G. B. VICO AND CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY

A STUDY OF THE THOUGHT OF GIAMBATTISTA VICO (1668-1744) IN THE LIGHT OF SOME CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS

A dissertation by
Sergio P. Negro

presented to

The Faculty of the
Graduate Theological Union

in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Theology

Berkeley, California
September 1, 1974

Committee Signatures:

Kenan B. Osborne
Chairman
Eldon G. Ernst
Daniel J. O'Hanlon
Bernard M. Loomer

Table of Contents

page

Introduction 1

Chapter I: Vico's Life and Intellectual Journey. . . . 5

I. Life. 5

II. The Development of Vico's Thought 31

Summary and Conclusions 56

Chapter II: Vico's Mature Thought: The Scienza nuova . 62

Introduction. 62

I. The Scienza nuova 63

II. Three Specific Aspects of Vico's Mature Thought 88

Summary and Conclusions 129

Chapter III: Some Interpretations of Vico's Thought. . 134

Introduction. 134

I. Vico's Personal Religiosity 138

II. Interpretations of Vico's Religious Thought to 1900 148

III. The Idealistic Interpretations of Vico's Thought 161

IV. The Vindication of Vico for the Roman Catholic Tradition 172

V. New Trends in the Interpretation of Vico's Thought 184

Summary and Conclusions 191

Chapter IV: Vico and Contemporary Theology: The Question of History 198

Introduction. 198

I. The Question of History 207

II. The Relationship of History and Theology. . . . 249

Summary and Conclusions 289

XUM

Chapter V: Vico and Contemporary Theology: The Question of God 297

Introduction 297

I. God in History: A Cultural-Historical Approach 301

II. God in Process: A Metaphysical Approach. . . . 323

III. God in Jesus Christ: The Possibility of Synthesis. 354

Summary and Conclusions. 359

Conclusion. 362

A Chronology of Vico's Works. 367

Selected Bibliography 369

XUM

Preface

In the final stage of Vico's intellectual journey the history and development of any being is a necessary part of the understanding of the nature of a thing. Perhaps the background and development of this study will be helpful in understanding its main thrusts.

The study is rooted in a strong personal interest in history. When I turned to theology as a main field of study, I developed a special curiosity for the relationship of history and theology. This curiosity led me first to investigate the questions of the historical Jesus, of the rooting of faith in historical events, and of historical events as the possible starting point for theological reflection. As I was investigating the methodological possibilities of a theological reflection based on the special significance of certain historical events, especially the historical experience of the Roman Catholic Church in the U.S.A. and the doctrinal question of religious freedom, I read W. Taylor Stevenson's History as Myth: The Import for Contemporary Theology, in which the author makes extensive use of Vico's thought. This rekindled forgotten memories of a sympathetic reading of Vico in a history of philosophy course in an Italian "Liceo." A thorough re-reading of Vico convinced me of his modernity and of his striking position as the first major proponent of the mode of thought which today is described as historical consciousness or historical understanding.

The question was raised: what would be the relationship of Vico's views of history, revolutionary in the intellectual setting at the beginning of the eighteenth century, to the theology of the twentieth century? Several problems emerged in Vico: the division of sacred and profane history, his apparent failure to extend the principle of historicity to theology, the conflict between immanence and transcendence in God. As the study progressed it became apparent that the questions that Vico left unanswered found an echo and perhaps an answer in some of today's theological developments. Three things seemed to stand out more prominently: (1) the problem of sacred and profane history, as posed by Vico, was resolved by modern biblical criticism; (2) the stance of historical understanding, original in Vico, must be extended to doctrinal formulas, theological conclusions and church institutions; and (3) the conflict between the transcendence and immanence of God could not be resolved with scholastic notions of God. The choice was made to compare Vico's thought with the thought of contemporary philosophers and theologians in the historicist and process frame of reference.

These comparisons yielded some hopefully significant results, reaffirming the validity of a perspective of historical understanding of theology and resolving some of the contradictions in Vico's thought.

There is no intention of saying that these forms of theological investigation are the only ones that would bear a positive relationship to Vico's work. There are other theological currents that could be pursued and would offer fruitful possibilities. Process thought, in its broadest form, is simply the frame of reference that I found most congenial and provocative.

Introduction

In recent years there has been a marked renewal of interest in Giambattista Vico. On the occasion of the third centennary of his birth (1668) a number of conferences and study weeks were held in Italy, bringing together Italian and international scholars to re-examine the relevance of Vico's work for contemporary thought. In the U.S.A. a collection of essays was published in which thirty-nine authors discuss the significance of Vico for such diverse fields as cultural and structural anthropology, linguistics, sociology, jurisprudence, philosophy, historiography and many others. New studies have shown that in many areas of study Vico anticipated contemporary thought and that many of his intuitions have been supported by later research.

In Vico's own judgment the great achievement of a lifetime of reflection and hard work was not attained until the publication of his last major work, the Scienza nuova. In his mature thought Vico looked at history from a new perspective, and history became for him not only the study of what man has done but also a new mode of knowledge revealing man's being to himself. For the Vico of the Scienza nuova man cannot be understood except in terms of history which is man's creation. And yet man is not alone in history: God is at work with man, and history is also the field of God's activity. Reality, at least the reality of human institutions, is seen as historical in nature, and nature is not a static concept but a continuous being born and unfolding manifested in the process of history.

The purpose of this study is to bring out Vico's vision of God and man in history as an important moment in the process of thought, a moment that finds its fuller expression in some important segments of contemporary philosophy and theology. His importance lies mainly in the fact that many authors today consider his thought as the first conscious expression of that attitude of historical understanding which is such an essential element of modern man's vision of himself and of his world.

Vico's life was very uneventful, but his intellectual odyssey reveals a painful yet faithful journey in search of a mode of knowledge that would be both ideal and real, abstract and concrete, imaginative and reflective (Chapter I). He finds the goal of his quest in the study of history and proclaims his discovery in the Scienza nuova, a work whose complexity obscured its riches for a long time (Chapter II). The history of the interpretations of Vico's thought shows a bewildering variety of viewpoints, and the conflict of views is nowhere more evident than in the assessment of Vico's religious thought. In the first half of this century two antithetical positions prevailed: one school viewed Vico as an absolute historicist and presented him as a theologically unorthodox author whose ideas lead logically to a pantheistic and anti-Christian position; the other school attempted to reclaim Vico for the Roman Catholic tradition and interpreted him as an orthodox, neo-scholastic thinker. In the last twenty-five years the strengths and the limitations of these monolithic viewpoints have become more and more apparent, and the scholarship on Vico has taken a more modest, more historical, more specific approach (Chapter III). The question of the orthodoxy of Vico's religious thought cannot be resolved on the basis of a theological tradition that regards the outstanding achievements of Greek philosophical thought as the only adequate basis for the conceptualization of Christian faith and doctrine, and no effort has yet been made to study Vico in the light of contemporary theology. Vico's religious thought should be very compatible with those forms of theological reflection that take seriously the implications of historical understanding, and it is in the area of the question of history and its relationship to theology that Vico's work will be found most fruitful (Chapter IV). Finally, the movement in contemporary theology broadly described as process thought will suggest a solution for the problem of the immanence and transcendence of God, which remains unresolved in Vico's thought (Chapter V).

This study hopes to show the contemporaneity of many of Vico's ideas and their relevance for some of the ongoing theological research. If there is any value in looking to the moment in history when a new perspective made its appearance, even though it may have remained neglected for a long time, Vico is relevant today as the moment when historical thinking first became self-conscious, explicit and somewhat systematic. And the perspective of historical understanding in contemporary theology will also make it possible to go beyond some rigid interpretations of Vico's religious thought and show that his understanding of religion and God is very much at home with some forms of contemporary theology and is illumined and made more coherent through the insights they are able to offer.

XUM

Chapter I

Vico's Life and Intellectual Journey

I. Life

1. The Autobiography

Vico begins his Autobiography with this statement: "Signor Giambattista Vico was born in Naples in the year 1670, of honest parents who left a rather good name for themselves."[1] But the baptismal records of the parish church of San Gennaro all'Olmo show that he was baptized on the 24th of June, 1668, having been born the day before.[2] This discrepancy in the date of birth may be taken as symbolic, or perhaps symptomatic, of the difficulties to be encountered in Vico's life and works. Accuracy of details is not one of his virtues. No explanation has been found for the mistaken date in the Autobiography. Fausto Nicolini suggests that perhaps the error was caused by Vico's father who may have altered the date on the birth or baptismal certificate in order to save his son

---

[1] Vita di Giambattista Vico scritta da se medesimo. Opere (1911), V, p. 3. References to Vico's works, unless otherwise identified, will be to the critical editions of Fausto Nicolini and indicated as Opere. The complete edition in eight volumes was published between 1911 and 1941. The 1953 edition is a one volume collection of selected writings and is the result of Nicolini's final editorial efforts. All translations are by the writer, unless otherwise specified.

[2] Reproduced in Enrico de Falco, La biografia di G.B. Vico: introduzione, figurazione, commentario (Rome: Casa editrice M. Ciranna, 1968), p. 28.

XUM

embarrassment when he entered school three years later than normal, due to a long illness.[3] But there is no evidence to support this conjecture.

Since much of the material of this chapter depends on the Autobiography and its interpretation, it would be well to examine it more in detail. Vico wrote the major portion of his autobiography in 1725, at the request of Gian Artico di Porcia, a Venetian nobleman and man of letters, who wanted to publish a series of lives of Italian authors. Apparently none of the prominent figures contacted ever accepted or completed the task, except Vico, who within a few months was able to send to Venice the story of his life through 1723. Porcia was also unable to find a publisher for his projected series of lives, and in December 1727 he asked Vico's permission to publish his autobiography as part of a collection of other writings edited by Angelo Calogerà, and as an example for the other authors of the kind of autobiography which he was trying to collect. Vico was very reluctant. He was afraid of being ridiculed for his presumption, especially by the literary circles in Naples which had not received any of his works too kindly. He agreed to this publication on the condition that his reluctance be explicitly stated, and he sent a supplement covering the intervening three years, mainly a discussion of the Scienza nuova, published for the first time in 1725. The

---

[3] Fausto Nicolini, Per la biografia di G.B. Vico, 2 vols. (Florence: Olschki, 1925), I, p. 214. Quoted in Angela Maria Jacobelli Isoldi, G.B. Vico: la vita e le opere (Bologna: Cappelli editore, 1960), p. 95.

Raccolta di opuscoli scientifici e filologici, edited by Calogerà, appeared in June-July 1729, and contains the Vita di Giambattista Vico scritta da se medesimo, with a list of his works added. Vico himself, in a later supplement to the autobiography, complained about the atrocity of the printing errors. At Vico's death, among his papers were found a corrected and revised copy of the printed life, and another dozen pages of supplement bringing the events up to date to the first months of 1731.[4]

The autobiography is the story of an intellectual journey, rather than a narrative of events.[5] This was the guiding idea of the whole series, which may have been conceived by Gian Artico di Porcia as the result of a letter by Leibniz to a mutual friend in Venice, written a few years before and expressing the wish that the intellectual leaders of the time would write an account of their discoveries and of the process by which they had arrived at their conclusions.[6] Vico states that he wrote his life "as a philosopher," and

---

[4] Benedetto Croce, Bibliografia vichiana: accresciuta e rielaborata da Fausto Nicolini, 2 vols. (Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi editore, 1947-48), I, pp. 61-65. In a letter to Nicolini given in the Appendix, Croce states that the two volume bibliography is now no longer his work, but rather Nicolini's. The work will be cited as Croce-Nicolini, Bibliografia vichiana. Vico's discussion of the autobiography and pertinent correspondence will be found in Opere (1911) V, pp. 62-67, 170, 193.

[5] Vico, for instance, does not give any family background at all, and does not even mention his marriage. As late as 1884 Robert Flint presumed that Vico was an only child, since he mentions no brothers or sisters. Robert Flint, Vico (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1884), p. 17.

[6] Croce-Nicolini, Bibliografia vichiana, I, p. 61.

> reflected on the affinities and aversions that he had, even as a child, for certain types of studies rather than for others, on the opportunities and the obstacles that promoted or impeded his progress, and, finally, on certain efforts in a special direction which eventually brought him to the conclusions on which he developed his last work, the Scienza nuova. This work proves that such should have been his literary life, and no other.[7]

This passage also supplies the key principle for the interpretation of Vico's autobiography and self-understanding. Vico saw himself as a philosopher who through many and difficult years searched for a system of thought which would satisfy his need for a cohesive view of reality, a view that would do justice to the whole man, not just his reason or his senses or his passions. This self-understanding by the author gives the perspective from which the autobiography was written and helps to explain at least some of the inaccuracies, omissions, and obscurities of the work. Vico, from the standpoint of his mature thought, which he felt to have reached in the Scienza nuova, looked back over his past and interpreted it as a long journey leading inevitably to this conclusion. His whole life experience was seen in function of the search which culminated in the Scienza nuova and from this search received its final meaning. Therefore,

> ...even though from a philological standpoint this work remains a questionable text which forces scholars to a continuous and laborious search for documents for the sake of reviewing and supplementing Vico's statements, it remains at the same time the precious documentation of the perspective from which Vico looked at himself and of the value that the facts had assumed

---

[7] Opere (1911), V, p. 62.

> for him. Even the eventual distortions become, as a result, an important document for the investigations of the spiritual world of the author.[8]

2. The Early Years

Vico was born in Naples, on June 23, 1668. His father, Antonio, had come from the countryside to find work in the city. At least from 1658 he was running his own tiny bookstore on the street of bookstores, Via San Biagio. The store had a small mezzanine which served as living quarters. Here his second wife, Candida Masullo, gave birth to eight children, of which three died in infancy. Giambattista was the sixth child. The family lived in conditions of utter poverty. Fausto Nicolini with vivid style describes these conditions:

> Only one who has seen with his own eyes how people lived in certain horrible back alleys of the old city of Naples now demolished by the picks of the urban renewal projects, can accept the possibility that such a large family could live, in frightening promiscuity, in a rat-hole approximately eighteen feet long, nine feet wide and nine feet high, without even a kitchen (the cooking was done in the street, with a burner). The only relief was the little store downstairs, almost completely filled by the counter and bookshelves, and a little window opening onto the street, through which, because it was so narrow and the building in front so high, dust, stale air and noises came into the room, rather than fresh air, sun and light.[9]

At the age of seven Vico fell from a ladder or a staircase and, hitting the ground head first, remained unconscious for five hours. He broke his skull on the right side and whoever attended him, perhaps the nearest barber, made some cuts to drain the blood and predicted that the boy would either die or have to live with severe brain damage. He was obviously wrong on both counts, but the child took three years to recuperate and return to normal. Vico attributes to this fall in childhood a profound change in his character and disposition: from a happy, spirited boy who could never remain still for long, he became more and more sad and melancholic. But when he adds that this is the proper character for original and profound thinkers, one is led to suspect that Vico's perspective is making its first appearance, and that he interprets his nearly fatal fall at the age of seven as the starting point of his intellectual journey.[10]

---

[8] Jacobelli Isoldi, op. cit., p. 94.

[9] Fausto Nicolini, La giovinezza di Giambattista Vico (1668-1700): saggio biografico (Bari: Giuseppe Laterza e Figli, 1932), p. 27.

After three years Vico returned to school and a pattern to be repeated several times makes its first appearance: every time that Vico begins a program of formal education he fails to complete it in the normal way. On returning to grammar school he found it too easy and in a conference with his father and his teacher he asked to be moved to the last year, promising that he would make up on his own what he would miss by skipping ahead. He kept his promise and finished grammar school in one year (1678-79). The following year he began secondary school, first with a private teacher, then as an extern at the Collegio Massimo al Gesù Vecchio, run by the Jesuits. In the fall of 1680 he enrolled again at the Collegio Massimo, and began to be noticed: in academic competition he won over three others who were thought to be the best students in the class. But by the second semester, when one of the students whom he had bested was promoted to a higher class while he was left to go over the same material, he dropped out of school and in three months, often studying through the night, completed on his own the program for that year and for the following year as well. In the fall of 1681 he began the next level of studies, his first meeting with philosophy, plunging into the Summulae of Pietro Juliani of Lisbon, and the Summulae logicales of Paolo Nicoletti from Udine. But this was more than he could take at the time. Discouraged he abandoned all studies for a year and a half, probably until the end of summer, 1683. Then one day he attended a meeting of one of the learned academies and the speeches and the conversations became for him, to use his own imagery, like the bugle call to battle for a pasturing warhorse. Again he enrolled in school, this time with a teacher, Giuseppe Ricci, S.J., whom he described as a follower of Scotus and Zeno. But, once more, impatient with the fact that Ricci was spending too much time discussing "being" and "substance," anxious to move on to new ideas, having heard that Suarez covered the whole field of philosophy, he left school and proceeded to study on his own either the Disputationes metaphysicae, or a summary of it in textbook form, by the title of Suarez repurgatus.[11]

---

[10] *Opere* (1911), V, p. 3.

In the social and political situation of this time one of the very few ways for a poor member of the lower classes to acquire both wealth and position was through the professions. Antonio Vico wanted his son to choose law and sent him, at sixteen years of age, to a private teacher, Francesco Verde. Within two months Vico, for the last time, grew tired of the minute and interminable discussion of law cases and moved in a different direction through his own reading, looking for the principles and theory of law. He must not, however, have neglected the practical side of the law entirely, because he recalls with obvious pride that at the age of sixteen (eighteen, in actuality, because of the mistaken birthdate), he won a case in a civil suit brought against his father by one of his competitors. Vico's deep need of praise and acceptance received such meager satisfaction that he is prone to magnify and exaggerate the few occasions when he achieved success in the eyes of others and was given deserved praise. This is apparent in his correspondence and in the autobiography. For example, the incident of the successful court trial is followed in the autobiography by another remembrance of an occasion when he read one of his youthful poems to a Jesuit priest famous for his style and eloquence, and he honored Vico by reading him his own poem on the same subject of a rose.[12] To be noted is the fact that within a few years, by his own account, he would come to despise his early attempts at poetry because of their exaggerated baroque style, redundant and affected in the extreme.

---

[11] Opere (1953), p. 7, n. 1.

Soon after his victory in court, Vico experienced a long and peaceful period in his life. It happened quite unexpectedly. He describes himself at the time:

---

[12] Opere (1911), V, p. 8.

> His delicate health was deteriorating as the result of tuberculosis, the family financial situation was in desperate straits, he had a burning desire for free time so that he could pursue his studies, and his character abhorred the noise and excitement of the courtroom...[13]

One day in the bookstore of a friend he met Monsignor Geronimo Rocca, bishop of Ischia, who was impressed by his conversation with this young man and eventually asked him to accept the position of tutor for the children of his brother Domenico Rocca, a wealthy and cultured landowner. He had a castle at Vatolla, a little country village about sixty-two miles from Naples. In the Autobiography Vico gives the impression that he lived at Vatolla nine years without interruption. This is hardly possible, since there is evidence of his presence elsewhere and the Rocca family had a villa at Portici and a home at Naples, their ordinary domicile, and Vico would be expected to follow the family as they moved during different times of the year.[14] It is possible to surmise the reasons why Vico would ignore his presence in other locations and would attempt to develop the fiction of nine years of solitude and isolations at Vatolla: (i) these were the most fruitful years of his personal study and he wants to present them as a unit, and (ii) being proud of his image of a self-taught thinker, he wants to emphasize his isolation and his aloofness from the various currents of thought prevalent in Naples during this time. Vico did spend about nine years with the Rocca family and they were the most fruitful years in the process of his maturation.[15] During this time he read works of philosophy and theology, civil and canon law, Latin classics, and Italian Renaissance classics, together with many of the sixteen century authors in philosophy and science. This period was a critical time in the intellectual formation of Vico and will need further consideration for an understanding of the development of his thought.

---

[13] Ibid., p. 9.

[14] For example, there is evidence that Vico was matriculated at the University of Naples during the years 1689-91, and that he obtained a law degree prior to 1694, because beginning in that year he is listed on some documents as utriusque iuris doctor. Jacobelli Isoldi, op. cit., p. 112.

3. Professor at the University

Having terminated his continuous association with the family of Domenico Rocca and returned to Naples at the age of twenty-seven or twenty-eight, Vico was again faced with the question of a profession and the direction of his life. He describes himself at his return to Naples as a stranger in his own country. But soon he entered into the stream of life by being brought into one of the intellectual circles which were both very fashionable as well as being the only vital places of learning, conversation and thinking in the city at that time. He became part of the group which met at the home of

---

[15] No conclusive evidence is available to determine the exact dates of this period. It is fairly certain that the end term was either late 1695 or early 1696, which would place the beginning in 1686-87. Jacobelli Isoldi, op. cit., p. 100.

Nicolò Caravita, prominent lawyer, literary man and promoter of cultural life and men of letters. Caravita gave Vico his start: he gave him the task to write the introductory essay to a collection of short works in honor of Don Francesco Benavides conte di Santo Stefano, departing Spanish viceroy. This led to another request to write the Latin eulogy for a collection on the occasion of the death of Catherine of Aragon, the mother of the next viceroy.

Vico had applied for the position of city clerk, which required a good knowledge of Latin, but was turned down. When, in 1697, the chair of professor of rhetoric at the University of Naples became vacant, Vico was reluctant to apply because he did not have any taste for the political intrigue that was a necessary element in the process of gaining the post, but Caravita urged him on, encouraging him to worry only about the academic aspect, while he would take care of the political maneuvers. Vico entered the competition, won the position,[16] was installed as professor of rhetoric at the beginning of 1699, and would remain at this post for over forty years, until he asked King Charles III of Bourbon, King of Spain, to appoint his son Gennaro to the chair, in view of his advanced age and poor health.[17] And Giambattista Vico spent the rest of his life in Naples, without ever leaving the city again, teaching his students at the university and private pupils at home to supplement the very meager salary attached to this particular academic position,[18] taking care of his family faithfully and lovingly, continuing to grow and mature in his thought as evidenced by his writings.

---

[16] Just barely, with twelve favorable votes out of twenty-two members of the commission. Opere (1953), p. 30, n.7.

[17] Opere (1911), V, p. 255. Letter of the 29th or 30th of December, 1740. Charles III had conquered Naples in 1734.

4. Vico's Family

One of Vico's first decisions and actions after receiving his appointment as professor at the university, was to move his family to a new home, at the Vicolo dei Gerolamini, number 15. The lease document describes the home as small, but by comparison with the previous living quarters it must have looked like a mansion. It had a living room, three other rooms, a kitchen, balcony, cellar and storage room, and even a small garden. Vico's mother had died recently, but his father and two brothers moved in with him. Here now he had enough room to establish a kind of a private school which became one of his main means of support.

Into this same house he brought his bride, Teresa Caterina Destito, whom he had known from infancy. Did Caterina Destito embody the ideal of feminine beauty which inspired many pages of Vico's writings?[19] There is no way of knowing. Did she have the kind of intelligence and education that would enable her to understand the intellectual struggles of her husband? A cross on the marriage documents would indicate that she was illiterate. Some biographers have described her as stupid, indolent, incapable or unwilling to assume the responsibility of taking care of the house and family. But they were probably confusing Vico's wife with another Caterina who came to live in the house, a daughter-in-law who did cause many difficulties.[20] There is enough evidence scattered throughout Vico's works and elsewhere to conclude that Caterina Destito was able to give to Vico the joys of a warm atmosphere at home and a large family, at times noisy and full of confusion, but also rich in the affection that enabled Vico to feel at ease, to overcome his diffidence, his suspicious nature, his depressions. He loved her dearly and shared with her the few joys and successes, as well as the many and trying sorrows of his life.[21]

---

[18] One hundred _ducati_ a year, plus a small fee for issuing a certificate to students to qualify them for law school. _Opere_ (1953), p. 29, n. 12 and 13.

[19] E.g., "In morte di donn'Angela Cimmino, Marchesa della Petrella," _Opere_ (1953), p. 1013.

Eight children were born, three died in infancy. There are many glimpses of the tender feelings and many-sided love of Vico for his children: among the things that he had saved and treasured, found after his death, was the ornate blanket purchased for the baptism of his first daughter, Luisa; he complains that he has to work and entertain in the midst of children and their noisy play, but with a hint of affectionate pride; the commission received for writing the life of

---

[20] Nicolini, La giovinezza di Giambattista Vico, p. 194.

[21] Jacobelli Isoldi, op. cit., pp. 118-19. In 1729 Vico wrote: "Ego uxorem triginta ab hinc annis duxi, quacum concordi adhuc animo vivo." Vici Vindiciae, Opere (1931), III, p. 297.

XUM

Antonio Carafa enables him to give his daughter a good dowry and an elaborate wedding; he is pleased with the modest successes of his children and rejoices in the praise and recognition given to them; he tries desperately to help and to save one of his sons who was constantly getting into trouble and even spent time in jail, and he fought for the custody of his child, a little granddaughter;[22] there are signs of deep respect and love between Vico and his son Gennaro, the one who took over his teaching position and remained by his side during his old age and illnesses.

In this supportive atmosphere of family life, with the encouragement of several loyal friends, with a slowly growing number of faithful and respectful students, Vico continued his struggles, not only with a mostly uncomprehending world, but also with himself, dissatisfied with his thought, always revising and rewriting its expressions.

5. Vico's Writings

In the autobiography Vico begins to discuss the content of his works from the Orazioni Inaugurali, the inaugural lectures which he was called upon to make before assembled dignitaries, faculty members and students at the opening of each academic year because of his position as professor of rhetoric. He discusses seven of them in his autobiography, all delivered between 1699 and 1708, although some of the exact years for individual lectures are still disputed. Only the seventh, in revised and enlarged form, was published during Vico's lifetime as De nostri temporis studiorum ratione.[23]

---

[22] Jacobelli Isoldi, ibid. There is an anecdote, one of the very few about Vico, concerning this wayward son, Ignazio. Vico, having exhausted all other means of trying to deal with him, not knowing what else to do, reported him to the police. But, when he saw the policemen coming to arrest him, as they were climbing the stairs, he cried out to him: "Son, save yourself!" The story is probably spurious, but it was told and retold many times, reappeared in many biographies, and was even dramatized on the stage. See Nicolini's account in Opere (1953), pp. 96-97.

After the death of Charles II, Emperor of Spain, in 1700, there was in Naples an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the Spanish rule and to bring in the Austrians. The incident became known as the Macchia conspiracy. Some of the leaders were arrested and two were condemned to death, Giuseppe Capece and Carlo di Sangro. Some influential person, perhaps the last of the Spanish viceroys, the Marquis of Villena, asked Vico to write the history of the conspiracy, apparently with the purpose of discrediting the persons and the ideas of the conspirators before European public opinion. And there are indications that what Vico wrote in De parthenopea coniuratione IX kalendas octobris MDCCI, with his characteristic integrity and respect for truth, was not found suitable for the intended purpose and therefore never published. Vico never says a word about this work either in the autobiography or in the lists of his works.[24] When in 1707 Austria was able to establish its rule over Naples, the two executed conspirators became martyrs for the cause, and Vico contributed to and edited a collection of commemorative pieces to honor their memories without showing the slightest indication of being aware of the contradiction between these two writings.[25] These incidents are signs and symptoms of the indifference and aloofness of Vico towards the political and social conditions of his time: he who would reach the end of his journey in the overpowering conviction that history is the work of man, took no part at all in the history of which he was a part.

---

[23] The other lectures were not published until 1869, edited by Antonio Galasso, not from the original text as delivered at the inaugural ceremonies, but from a revised and somewhat enlarged text prepared by Vico himself for publication in 1709-10. Croce Nicolini, Bibliografia vichiana, I, 9-12.

[24] Opera (1953), pp. 1054-1055.

The next step in Vico's troubled intellectual journey came with the publication of De antiquissima italorum sapientia ex linguis latinae originibus eruenda, which Vico himself often calls Metafisica because it was intended to be the first of a trilogy, Liber metaphysicus, Liber physicus, Liber moralis. The third was never written, the second was probably written but has been lost, along with an appendix on logic which was to follow the Metafisica, printed in 1710. This book brought Vico to the attention of other intellectuals in Italy. The Giornale de' letterati d'Italia printed a review of the book which concluded with a veiled criticism expressed as the hope that the author would clarify some of his ideas and produce evidence in support of some of his statements. This produced a lengthy and somewhat angry reply and self-defense from Vico, answered by another longer and more specific article in the

---

[25] Flint, op. cit., p. 30; Jacobelli Isoldi, op. cit., p. 125.

Giornale, which begins with this paragraph:

> Signor Giambattista Vico had published his little book of the Metafisica which we reviewed in the fifth volume of our Giornale with many signs of appreciation, as anyone could testify who would take the trouble to read that whole article with a dispassionate mind. But the learned gentleman thought just the opposite, and declared to be upset and offended by the reviewer, either giving a negative interpretation to the praises which we duly and sincerely give him or complaining too bitterly about some minor remarks critical of his work which we stated in all modesty.[26]

Anyone even slightly acquainted with Vico would expect yet another extended answer from his pen, and so it came, although more moderate in tone. The exchange ended with a paragraph in the Giornale acknowledging Vico's second reply. The controversy served the valuable purpose of leading Vico to clarify, restate, and even modify some of his views, but even though "honorably conducted and settled with great courtesy from both sides" as Vico himself states,[27] it marked the first serious clash with the intellectual world of his time.

Vico's next enterprise was a historical work. In 1714 one of his disciples, Adriano Carafa, asked him to write a biography of his uncle Antonio Carafa, a Neapolitan nobleman and army general in the service of the Austrian Empire, famous not only for his ability as a field commander but also for his great cruelty.[28] Working for two years, mostly at night, using as his sources almost exclusively the archives which the nephew had inherited from his uncle, Vico produced De rebus gestis Antonii Caraphaei, a work which in the words of Vico tried to balance "honor for the subject of the biography, respect for the princes and the justice which one must have for truth."[29] Nicolini states that this last task was "so much more difficult since often the reality of the facts, in effect never betrayed by our author, appeared anything but honorable for the subject of the biography..."[30] This historical book marks an important moment in the intellectual life of Vico, because it led him to read, or probably re-read with new understanding, the book De iure belli et pacis by Hugo Grotius. The insights stimulated by this study appear as a turning point in Vico's thought.

---

[26] Opere (1914), I, p. 223. Both articles from the Giornale, both of Vico's replies, and the final statement from the journal are found in the same volume, pp. 197-279.

[27] Opere (1911), V, p. 37.

[28] The massacres that took place during a nine-month campaign in Hungary have become known as the Butcheries of Eperjes. Flint, op. cit., p. 32; Croce-Nicolini, Bibliografia vichiana, I, pp. 77-79.

> After meditating on the thought of Grotius, Vico began to elaborate, in various successive drafts, those ideas which will finally attain a systematic formulation in the three books of the Diritto Universale, published in 1720, 1721, 1722.[31]

Diritto Universale is the designation used by Vico himself for the following publications: De uno universi iuris principio et fine uno (1720), De constantia iurisprudentis (1721), and Notae in duos libros, alterum 'De uno universo iuris principio...,' alterum 'De constantia iurisprudentis' (1722). These works brought some international recognition to Vico: one of the most pleasant experiences and fondest memories of

---

[29] Opere (1911), V, p. 38.

[30] Croce-Nicolini, Bibliografia vichiana, I, p. 78.

[31] Jacobelli Isoldi, op. cit., p. 127.

Vico was the praise received from the famous scholar Jean Le Clerc, both in a personal letter and in two articles in his *Bibliothèque ancienne et moderne.* Vico introduced his correspondence with Le Clerc in the autobiography and translated the articles, with the intention of attaching the translation to a new edition of the *Vita* which did not materialize.[32]

Encouraged by such illustrious praise and by the warm approval of his friends for his work and he himself beginning to feel more secure in his own thinking and sensing that he was near the solution for which he had been searching, Vico felt bold enough to enter the competition for another university chair which had become vacant, the morning chair of law. He was looking both for greater honor as well as greater remuneration.[33] He felt qualified for the post because of his study of law and the *Diritto universale*, just published and favorably noticed even by Le Clerc; he felt entitled to the chair because he had the longest service at the university; he was confident "because of the life which he had led in his own country, where his creative work had given honor to everyone, been of help to many and done harm to no one."[34] He went as far as presenting his hour-long lecture prepared in twenty-four hours on a text drawn by chance the day before. But when he was passed over in favor of one whom he felt was less qualified but who had stronger political support, while he refused to lower himself to political intrigue, he withdrew his name from the competition. Vico's bitter disappointment is painful to see, in his account of the incident in the autobiography, in the resentment towards his compatriots who failed to recognize his merits.[35] But, by his own assessment, he did not allow himself to be defeated by this blow to his pride and sense of justice. He accepted the fact that he would have to remain in the same life situation for the rest of his days, he accepted the mediocrity of his condition, and dedicated himself completely to further study and development of his system of thought.

---

[32] *Opere* (1911), V, p. 42; also Croce-Nicolini, *Bibliografia vichiana*, I, p. 64.

[33] The position payed six hundred *ducati* a year, six times Vico's salary as professor of rhetoric. *Opere* (1911), V, p. 43.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

The event just described happened in 1723. In less than two years Vico had reached a new level in his search for the unity of truth, revamped his own thought and written a new book in the attempt to express it and communicate it. On December 26, 1724, Vico wrote to Cardinal Lorenzo Corsini, the future Pope Clement XII, thanking him for his willingness to accept the dedication of his new book to him. This acceptance normally implied also the willingness to assume at least part of the expenses of publication. But a fresh heartbreak was in store for Vico: on July 20, 1725, Cardinal Corsini wrote to him to tell him that he would be unable to subsidize his new book, due to some "exorbitant expenses" which he had incurred when visiting his diocese of Frascati.[36] The book was the Scienza nuova prima in forma negativa, never printed and now

---

[35] See, e.g., letters XXXIV, XXXIX, LVII, in Opere (1911), V, pp. 175f., 185-87, 209f.

[36] Ibid., pp. 169-70.

XUM

lost. By now misfortune had a familiar face for Vico and he was no longer afraid of it. Since the book which was ready for publication was much too big for his meager resources, "he concentrated all his rational powers in a relentless effort to find a more positive approach to the subject, more cogent and therefore more effective."[37] By the end of October of the same year 1725 the new book was printed and ready for distribution: it was the *Principi di una scienza nuova d'intorno alla natura delle nazioni, per li quali si ritruovano altri principi del diritto naturale delle genti*. On the reverse of the letter by Cardinal Corsini mentioned above there is a note in Vico's handwriting which says, in part, "I was therefore forced to take care of this matter out of my own poverty...by selling a ring which I had with a five grain diamond of the highest purity and with this money I was able to pay for the printing and the binding of the copies of the book which...I dedicated to the same cardinal."[38]

The importance of this moment for Vico cannot be exaggerated. His own words convey his feelings best. In a letter to his long-time friend Padre Bernardo Maria Giacchi, to whom he was sending a copy of the *Scienza nuova*, he wrote:

> Providence be forever praised, because when to the weak mortal eyes it appears to be nothing but severe justice, then more than ever its supreme kindness is at work! Because in this book I feel as if I had put on a new man, and the urges to complain about my misfortunes and to lash out against the corrupted state

---

[37] *Ibid*., p. 48.

[38] *Opere* (1953), p. 60, n. 4.

> of the intellectual life which has caused my misfortune have been checked, because this state and this misfortune have strengthened me and have helped me to prepare this work. Even more (this may not be true but I would like it to be) this work has filled me with a certain quality of heroism as the result of which I am no longer perturbed by the fear of death and my spirit is no longer concerned with discussions of my rivals. Finally the judgement of God has planted me solidly, as if on a high, unmovable mountain top: it is his judgement which renders justice to the works of genius by the appreciation of wise men, who have always and everywhere been very few.[39]

And in the letter which accompanied a copy sent to Cardinal Lorenzo Corsini:

> And so I have completed...this last of my labors, having spent twenty five years of continuous and difficult reflection on this subject. Or, if I should write other books, they would only be corollaries of this one.[40]

Vico was fundamentally correct in his assessment. The last years of his life saw him at work correcting, augmenting, revising, rewriting and publishing again his major work. His fame and his influence in the world of thought have come primarily from the *Scienza nuova*. There were a number of minor pieces, such as poems and discourses for various occasions, one more inaugural lecture worthy of mention, *De mente heroica*, in 1732, the addition to and the revision of the autobiography, and others. But the *Scienza nuova*, published in different versions in 1725, 1730-31, and 1744, was his consuming interest and his towering achievement.

The battles and the disappointments were not yet ended. One of his Neapolitan detractors, not yet identified with certainty, sent a distorted notice of the *Scienza nuova* to the editor of the *Acta eruditorum lipsiensia* who wrote a contemptuous, brief note in the October issue, 1727, dismissing the book as of no value, the work of an hallucinated and poorly educated mind, best suited to the way of thinking of the Roman church, and received with nothing but boredom even in Italy. This article was brought to the attention of Vico some time later, and in 1729 he wrote a reply, *Notae in Acta lipsiensia*, also known as *Vici vindiciae*, now available in two versions, both showing Vico in an outburst of uncontrolled passion, not defending his ideas but simply lashing out in anger and in pain. At about the same Vico was involved in negotiations with an editor and a printer in Venice who wanted to reprint the *Scienza nuova* and the *Vita*, with whatever additions and corrections Vico would care to make. But something in a letter from Venice irritated and angered Vico who demanded that all his manuscripts and books be returned. Frantically he proceeded to rewrite the work completely and by December 1730 he produced the second edition. The *Scienza nuova seconda* was not received with any greater enthusiasm than the first. There was a small circle of friends and disciples around Vico who, perhaps without understanding fully the thought of the master, continued to show their appreciation, to shower praise on him and to spread and defend his ideas. But the educated world by and large either ignored or ridiculed Vico's work. And yet, with unbroken perseverance, he continued to polish and refine, to add and correct and rewrite, and even to spread knowledge of his work through his correspondence.[41]

---

[39] *Opere* (1911), V, pp. 175-76. Written November 25, 1725.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 174. Written November 20, 1725.

6. The Last Years

Vico had never been in very strong health, but for the last twenty years of his life he also had to face more serious types of illness, in particular rheumatoid arthritis and some kind of lesion in his throat which eventually became cancerous.

During his last years Vico did enjoy some small signs of recognition and respect, especially from Monsignor Celestino Galiani who in 1732 became the minister of education, and asked him to deliver that inaugural lecture already mentioned, De mente heroica, which in a sense is Vico's swan song, a moving hymn to the creative powers of the human mind.[42] In 1730, probably through the sponsorship of Lodovico Antonio Muratori, Vico was made a member of the Accademia degli Assorditi of Urbino, and in 1735 of the Accademia degli Oziosi in Naples. In 1734 Galiani again made him the spokesman of the university in greeting the new king when Spanish rule once again replaced Austrian domination. In 1735 Galiani also helped him to receive the appointment as royal historian, a much sought after title because it was a recognition of talent and accomplishment and also brought added remuneration.[43]

---

[41] See Opere (1911), V, pp. 62-71; Opere (1953), p. 81, n. 2; p. 82, n. 3; p. 85, n. 6. Perhaps the printer or editor simply complained that six hundred pages of corrections and additions were more than he had expected.

[42] See Opere (1953), p. 102. This is an appendix to the autobiography by Nicolini.

[43] Jacobelli Isoldi, op. cit., pp. 133-34.

There are conflicting reports as to the last few years of Vico's life. Two of his earlier biographers, Villarosa and Solla, describe a slow and progressive deterioration of Vico's physical and mental condition, to the point of being immobilized first in a chair and then in bed, and losing memory and awareness to the point of not recognizing his children and his friends. Nicolini argues rather convincingly against such view, pointing to the evidence of continued intellectual activity throughout this time, such as correspondence, poems, and careful attention to the third rewriting of the Scienza nuova which must have been ready for the printer just before Vico died, since it appeared six months after his death, and on January 10, 1744, Vico wrote the dedication.[44]

Vico died on January 23, 1744, at the age of seventy-five.

Misfortune and misunderstandings followed Vico even after death. At the time of his funeral an argument arose between the members of the confraternity of Santa Sofia, to which Vico belonged, and his colleagues at the university over the question of who had the right to hold the tassels of the funeral cover. The question was not resolved, everyone walked away in a huff, and the body of Vico was left to the family in the courtyard. The funeral had to be postponed until the following day when it was conducted with dignity and reverence by the cathedral canons and the academic community, without the "brothers" of the confraternity.[45]

---

[44] Ibid., p. 135; Nicolini in Opere (1953), pp. 104-106.

[45] Nicolini, ibid.

7. Vico's Character

The multiple dimensions of Vico's character are not easily described and the mystery of the person not fully revealed either in his life or in his work. One of the most successful and beautiful attempts at capturing the personality of Vico is by Fausto Nicolini, a scholar who until his death not too long ago, had devoted his whole life to the study of Vico. He describes Vico as having a very nervous temperament from the time he fell from the ladder at the age of seven. He also possessed a high level of emotional life, a sensitivity which bordered on the morbid together with a simplicity that was almost naive, a great openness and candor and generosity. He displayed a tendency towards sadness and gloom, at times gentle and communicative, at times closed in and foreboding. He had a need to live within himself, in questioning self-examination or even in tortured introspection. He was endowed to an extraordinary degree with a consciousness of the dignity and gravity of human life. With an iron will and unflagging perseverence he was able to work with an intensity that would have destroyed another person perhaps stronger in health but weaker in determination. In his work he was always impatient to move from the thought to its accomplishment, demanding immediate action, trying to overcome obstacles with one push or bypass them with one leap. His writings indicate a certain lack of intellectual discipline, for example, in his dealing with sources and data, or in engaging in marathon writing to rush a book into print and then immediately starting a painful and protracted process of revision. He could be sharp and caustic, both in teasing and joking but even more in bitter sarcasm. He combined an exalted view of his own worth with a stubborn and sincere modesty which seems difficult to reconcile with his constant and burning desire for praise and recognition. He was very quick to take offense and to feel wounded by rather innocent remarks, reacting with sudden and at times frightening anger, but gave no signs of holding rancor or hatred in his heart. One characteristic needs to be underlined: Vico was dissatisfied with his own thinking and writing for most of his life, at least until the publication of Scienza nuova seconda, when he finally felt that he had attained the goal of his life and the end of his search, although he continued to revise it until his death.[46]

This was the man Giambattista Vico.

II. The Development of Vico's Thought

1. Introduction

Two preliminary questions must be mentioned briefly, i.e., (i) the question of Vico's relationship to his cultural environment and (ii) the question of distinct phases in his intellectual development.

(i) Vico creates the impression of nine years of isolation in the solitude of Vatolla, perhaps consciously or unconsciously reflecting the pattern of Descartes' stay in Holland, and on his return to Naples he emphasizes his condition of being a stranger and unknown. He also makes a point of the fact that he was called "a self-taught man" and that he was his own teacher.[47] But this view is an exaggeration, reflecting a later perspective, from a time when Vico did see himself alone and against the culture of his own time. This view needs to be corrected and balanced by both internal and external evidence. Vico was self-taught in the sense that he reacted against formal education and did most of his studies on his own initiative, as well as in the sense that he did not have a teacher to influence him in any sustained way. But both his writings and his life reveal the many ways in which he was affected both positively and negatively by the intellectual currents of his time.

---

[46] Nicolini, La giovinezza di Giambattista Vico, p. 29; also Opere (1953), p. 102.

Naples experienced a resurgence of intellectual activity after the plague of 1656. In the second half of the seventeenth century this city was a flourishing center of culture and one where thinkers had the most freedom in Italy, notwithstanding the attempt by the Inquisition and the local ecclesiastical tribunal to try some of the young intellectual leaders for atheism in 1689-93. The best way to describe this intellectual scene is to call it eclectic. There was a strong current of atomistic Epicureanism as received through Lucretius and Pierre Gassendi. There was a memory of the Renaissance forerunners of naturalism, Telesio, Bruno and Campanella, who had all taught in Naples. Galileo had been condemned in 1633, but in the second half of the century his works were beginning to be reprinted, except for the *Dialogo dei massimi sistemi*, and his experimentalism and that of Francis Bacon were in vogue, alongside the rationalism of Descartes. There was a strong element of opposition to Aristotle and the scholasticism taught in the religious schools. The quietism of Molinos was present, opposed by the Jesuits, but the intellectual life in Naples at this time had a distinct anti-clerical flavor. In literature *marinismo* was dominant for a while, with its baroque excesses of artificiality, but was soon opposed by another movement called *capuismo*, which called for a return to the clean lines and strength of medieval and classic Italian language.

---

[47] Opere (1911), V, p. 23.

Vico was clearly in touch with all the elements of this eclectic scene.[48] But, as Max H. Fisch states:

> Now the chief defect of detail in Vico's autobiography is that not only it exaggerates his isolation from the new philosophy during the Vatolla years (1686-95), but represents him as having taken up a position against it when he did become acquainted with it, a position which in fact he did not approach until about 1708, and did not fully reach before 1720.[49]

---

[48] E.g., Vico began to write poetry in the ultra-baroque style, but then changed to *capuismo*. See Max Harold Fisch, "Introduction," in M.H. Fisch and T.G. Bergin, *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, Great Seal Books edition, 1963), pp. 31-34; Nicola Badaloni, *Introduzione a G.B. Vico* (Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 1961), pp. 297-302.

[49] Fisch, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-36.

(ii) On the question of distinct stages in Vico's thought the standpoint of interpretation determines the judgement. The idealist interpreters, such as Benedetto Croce, Giovanni Gentile, and Fausto Nicolini, speak of two or three definite stages with clearly defined and contrasting positions in Vico's thought. The scholastic interpreters, such as Franco Amerio and Emilio Chiocchetti, generally hold for complete unity and almost identity of thought throughout Vico's life. More recent interpreters, such as Nicola Abbagnano, Jacobelli Isoldi, Enrico de Falco, Guido Fassò, judge both previous views to be too partisan, and hold that there is a true process of development which at times involves strong contradictions, but that the development also has unity and continuity given by the fact that the questions and the problems are the same, from the beginning to the end. The more recent view, having learned from the efforts of its predecessors, seems more balanced and more accurate. Gentile himself had recognized that one can speak of phases in the thought of a philosopher only in a relative sense, because every phase presumes a preparation, and no phase is so isolated as to be easily separated from those that will follow: a philosophical system has a continuity in its historical process and can only be divided by abstraction.[50]

2. Preparation

In reference to Vico's autobiography one must never lose sight of the standpoint from which it is written, but at the same time the work cannot be dismissed as being nothing but Vico's vision of himself in 1725. He sees signs of his mature attitudes in the choices he made as a young man: the attitudes were not yet present, but some inner feeling and urge, however inarticulated, must have motivated his choices.

---

[50] Giovanni Gentile, Studi Vichiani (Messina: Giuseppe Principato Editore, 1915), p. 17.

He prefers one of his teachers, Giuseppe Ricci, whom he describes as a Scotist and Zenonist, because the world of ideas as presented by him had more reality than the nominalism of his previous teacher, Antonio del Balzo, and sees in this preference an anticipation of his later propensity towards Plato. But when Ricci seemed to become mired in a fruitless pursuit of distinctions, he left him as well.

In the study of law, he grew tired of his teacher after two months of studying precedents and decisions without ever considering the principles of jurisprudence: he interprets the need for a world of universal ideas and principles as the sign of his metaphysical bend. And, in reading law on his own, he became attracted by two things: the ability of some medieval authors to draw principles of universal justice from the practical determinations of rights in Roman law, and the attention paid to the wording of the law by the experts. It would be improper to read into this discovery the unity of philosophy and philology achieved in the Scienza nuova, but why not accept it as an indication of a hidden need to keep in touch with the concrete and the particular?[51]

---

[51] Opere (1911), V, pp. 6-7.

XUM

At this point, as a tutor for the Rocca family he had the opportunity for protracted and somewhat systematic study. The readings which he outlines for this period and the interpretations given in the autobiography have given rise to extensive discussions and disagreements. Following the order given there, Vico moves from the study of canon law to the study of dogma, specifically the question of grace, which he reads in the works of Antonius Richardus (pseudonym for Stephen Richards), whom he interprets as an Augustinian. Then, inspired by the humanist philosopher Lorenzo Valla, he begins a study in depth of the Latin language, perhaps the one area where his outstanding abilities were recognized during his lifetime. He studied in particular Cicero, Virgil and Horace and he compared them with the classics of the Italian language, respectively, Boccaccio, Dante and Petrarca. Again he became interested in metaphysics: he discovered that Aristotle did not help him in his search for universal principles of ethics and politics, and he turned to Plato which he made one of his main authors, although Vico's Platonism is more closely related to the neo-Platonism of Renaissance philosophers. He also read Tacitus and other works of historical and political interest. He became interested in questions of cosmology and physical science with the result of confirming his rejection of the Epicurean and the Stoic view of the world. At one point he felt that he should study geometry, but only went as far as the fifth proposition of Euclid. Because Lucretius was much in vogue in Naples when he left the city, he spent some time reading the De rerum natura. The fame of Descartes reached him and he studied him diligently, or rather he read the Fundamenta physicae by Hendrick van Roy, which he thought to be Descartes. Even at this point in the autobiography Vico begins his argument against Descartes which in reality does not appear in his writings until some years later. But he elaborates upon it on this occasion because the Vatolla stay was over and he was returning to Naples which he found under the sway of Cartesianism.[52]

These years of study mark a major step forward in the process of maturation for Vico. In 1695, at his return to Naples, he no longer appears as the confused and aimlessly wandering young man of nine years before. By giving some content to his dissatisfaction he seems to have reached a level of sound criticism not only towards the sterile traditionalism of the schools but also towards the scientism, and the emphasis on physical sciences and mathematics of the new culture.

3. The Inaugural Lectures

The first example of Vico's writing now available is a poem published in 1963, with the title Affetti di un disperato. It is the best of his poetry and a good reference point on the questions of Vico's acquaintance with his cultural milieu, and of his religious attitudes. It will be discussed in Chapter III.

The first expressions of Vico's philosophical thought are the seven inaugural lectures, of which the last one, De nostri temporis studiorum ratione, is the one usually given the most attention. The nature of these writings must be kept in mind: they were addresses, delivered before a large and varied audience, although the text that is available to us was probably subsequently revised. The style is pedagogical and hortatory, and Vico is concerned with their literary quality as much as with the validity of their content. Ignoring the rhetorical character of these lectures can lead the interpreter to give the wrong value to isolated statements as if they were first and foremost careful expressions of philosophical conclusions.[53] A variety of conflicting interpretations have been suggested for these lectures. Gentile interprets them as the first phase of Vico's thought, clearly voicing a neoplatonic viewpoint, nourished on renaissance philosophers, and revealing the idealistic, pantheistic, anti-Cartesian tendencies of Vico's philosophy. Donati sees the lectures in relationship to the Diritto Universale and the question of wisdom, its foundation, purpose and method. Corsano traces and supports his great theme of the humanistic "conversion" and first period of Vico's intellectual activity. Fisch judges the teaching of these lectures to be "largely Cartesian." Croce interprets this first stage of Vico's epistemology as being a direct reaction to Descartes, although he makes reference only to the last lecture and includes the De antiquissima and the Risposte in what he calls the first form of Vico's thought.[54]

---

[52] The years at Vatolla are found described in Vita, Opere (1911), V, pp. 9-20.

---

[53] E.g., Gentile, op. cit., p. 38., takes the title of the first lecture: "Suam ipsius cognitionem ad omnem doctrinarum orbem brevi absolvendum maximo cuique esse incitamento," and interprets it as a finished statement of an idealistic philosophy, as follows, "...that is to say, knowledge of the mind of man contains in itself the principle of all that can be known, because in the human spirit are condensed all the forms of reality."

And how did Vico view these early expressions of his thought? From the perspective of 1725, he says:

> From the time of the first oration of which we have spoken, it is evident both in it and in all that followed, but above all this last, that Vico was agitating in his mind a theme both new and grand, to unite in one principle all knowledge human and divine. But all these arguments of which he had discoursed fell too far short of it. He was therefore glad that he had not published these orations...[55]

It is certainly proper to doubt that Vico was aware at the time of the lectures of his "theme both new and grand." But Vico simply states that from the content of the lectures a common theme emerges having to do with a unifying principle for all knowledge. And in this his own assessment should be accepted.

The common theme can be traced through a cursory look at the sentences which Vico chose as titles of the lectures. The first lecture speaks of self-knowledge as the motivation for the pursuit of all knowledge: with optimistic enthusiasm Vico wants to convince the students of the power of man's spirit so that they will develop it in every possible way. The second lecture deals with the other side of the coin: no one does more harm to himself than the fool and the ignorant; man has a choice and in his freedom he may fail to attain all the possibilities of his spirit. The third lecture adds a new dimension to the image of man emerging from the first two: man can misuse his freedom even by distorting knowledge and making it the source of pride and strife, and the greatest force against this distortion is the tendency of men to associate with one another, to share their knowledge, recognizing what they owe each other. The fourth lecture continues the notion of the social character of knowledge, now dealing with its social responsibility: the greatest and most worthy "use" of knowledge is the common good. The fifth lecture may reflect the historical situation of the time, the war of the Spanish succession which affected the political situation of Naples, and declares that education and knowledge are a positive asset even for the conduct of successful military campaigns. The sixth lecture returns to the theme of man's corruption, the need for study of all areas of knowledge and a first suggestion of a method. Vico's assessment was plainly correct: the inaugural lectures fell far short of his grand new theme. It is true that in them there are some anticipations of Vico's later thought, e.g., the refusal to restrict the spirit of man to abstract intellectual activity, the consideration of the social dimension present in man's pursuit of knowledge, the concern for the role of language. But it would be of equal concern to underline the statements and ideas that are in opposition to later conclusions.[56]

---

[54] Gentile, op. cit., pp. 36-88; Benvenuto Donati, Nuovi studi sulla filosofia civile di G.B. Vico: con documenti (Florence: Felice Le Monnier Editore, 1936), pp. 171ff.; Antonio Corsano, Umanesimo e religione in G.B. Vico (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1936), p. 57, 35-59 passim; idem, G.B. Vico (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1956), pp. 46-47, where Corsano adds a discussion of the pedagogical concerns of Vico, flavoring the lectures; Fisch, op. cit., p. 37; Benedetto Croce, La filosofia di G.B. Vico (Bari: Editori Laterza, 1973), p. 11.

[55] Opere (1911), V, p. 31. Translated in Fisch and Bergin, Autobiography, p. 147.

Vico gives special prominence in the autobiography to the seventh inaugural lecture, titled De nostri temporis studiorum ratione. The University of Naples wanted to observe the occasion of the opening of the academic year with special solemnity in honor of Charles of Ausburg, one of the contenders for the throne and later emperor of Spain, who had conquered Naples in 1707. The published De ratione is dedicated to Charles of Austria not by Vico but by the university. The printed version is five times the length of the other lectures and shows signs of having been revised with particular care. The method of studies does not refer only to the ways recommended as best suited for the process of learning, but its meaning is expanded to include the broader, theoretical question of a fundamental understanding, approach and attitude towards knowledge. Although Vico will continue throughout all his works a stance of opposition to Descartes, De ratione is the most systematic and elaborate delineation of his opposition to Descartes, as he understood him.[57]

---

[56] Vico summarizes the inaugural lectures, as he understood them in 1725, in his autobiography, Opere (1911), V, pp. 27-31.

[57] See Yvon Belaval, "Vico and Anti-cartesianism," in Giorgio Tagliacozzo, ed., Hayden V. White, co-ed., Giambattista Vico: An International Symposium (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), pp. 77-91. The author has gathered together all of Vico's thought on the subject. He concludes: "It should be observed...that Vico, who, in unison with his whole epoch, views Descartes' philosophy as pivoting on the Discours and the Principes, does not impress us as having read his author with close attention. He has heard Descartes spoken of, has leafed through his books, but has never actually studied him. He would doubtless have been incapable of doing so. Hence, it is really not Descartes whom he attacks, but Cartesianism (Pascal, Malebranche, Spinoza, etc.);..." Ibid., p. 90.

The method of studies involves a discussion of proper instruments, available aids and an overall goal. Vico sees his own time dominated by the new critical analysis, which he identifies with the Cartesian method and to which he opposes a method that does not exclude "topical philosophy," the full range of human experience, including the concrete, the practical, the intuitive. Vico's presentation in this work is a contrast of the new critical approach, the Cartesian method, with what he attributes to the more ancient scholars, namely the topical method, and to discuss the respective advantages and disadvantages in various areas of human thought and activity, such as physical sciences, medicine, ethics and politics, poetry, jurisprudence. Vico does not deny all the accomplishments of the new critical method, but argues that in a comprehensive judgement it is found wanting, because "...in order to free its first truth not only from all falsehood, but also from all suspicion of falsehood, it demands that the mind reject all secondary truths and all probable truths as if they were false."[58] This is unacceptable to Vico because it ignores too large a portion of human experience and sets up too rigid a distinction between true and false, as if reality were made up only of things that are always totally true or totally false. More specifically, the new critical method leads to the neglect of the moral sciences, especially those dealing with the creative and emotional side of man, because no certainty is possible in the areas where the freedom of man is active.[59] The new speculative criticism does deadly harm to poetry, because it frowns upon, plays down and obscures both imagination and memory. It reverses the concrete order of human activity where discovery precedes proof, and it tries to move by rational deduction from a first principle of truth, while reality has an abundance, a richness that cannot be attained simply by descent from first principles, but which must be confronted with a sense of discovery and creative ingenuity. This conviction will never fail Vico, and in the *Scienza nuova* of 1744 he would write:

---

[58] De ratione, Opere (1914), V, p. 81. "Secondary truths" translates "vera secunda," used by Vico in the sense of the principles that form the foundation of a particular science and are not universally applicable first principles. "Probable truth" translates "verisimilia," "which are somewhat in between truth and falsehood, being almost always true and very rarely false." Ibid.; see Ernesto Grassi, "Critical Philosophy or Topical Philosophy? Meditations on De nostri temporis studiorum ratione," in Tagliacozzo, op. cit., p. 43.

> Divine providence did well in human affairs when it promoted topics before criticism in human minds, because first comes awareness and then judgment of things. Topics is the faculty that renders minds inquisitive and ingenious, just as criticism makes them precise; and in those early times it was necessary to find all the things needed for human life, and discovery is the proper function of creative ingenuity.[60]

Some of the future directions of Vico's thought are beginning to make an uncertain appearance, as the notion of common sense, for instance, the real foundation of the

---

[59] *De ratione*, *ibid*., p. 91.

[60] *Opere* (1953), paragraph 498, p. 569. In note 4 Nicolini remarks that here, by asserting the temporal priority of topical philosophy, Vico has turned the pedagogical theory of *De ratione* into historical theory. N.B., the word "*ingegno*" is translated here as "creative ingenuity,"rather than "genius," which has a connotation, not intended by Vico, of being restricted to the few persons of genius.

verisimilia. And there is one statement which, however confusedly, foreshadows one of the turning points in his intellectual development:

> These propositions in the realm of physics, which are proposed as true on the strength of the geometrical method, are nothing more than probably true, and from geometry they derive the method, not the proof: in the realm of geometry we prove things because we create them; if we were able to prove things in physics it would mean that we were able to create them. Only in one, in God, are the forms of things true, because the nature of things is modeled on them.[61]

This was the first expression of the *verum-factum* principle, the central idea of Vico's next major work, the *Liber metaphysicus*.

4. *Liber Metaphysicus*

In dedicating the book to his friend Paolo Mattia Doria, Vico makes reference to an after dinner discussion in the home of his friend during which he had presented some of his views on the nature of motion and was urged by the guests present to write down his ideas, explaining them and supporting them. After the inaugural lectures Vico was ready and anxious to move from the pedagogical to the philosophical field, and he conceived the plan of the *De antiquissima italorum sapientia ex linguae latinae originibus eruenda libri tres. Liber primus: metaphysicus. Liber secundus: physicus. Liber tertius: moralis. 1710*. So read the title page. But only the first was certainly written and published, the *Liber* primus sive metaphysicus.[62]

---

[61] *De ratione*, *Opere* (1914), I, p. 85.

In a thorough and clear discussion of the book, Jacobelli Isoldi states that it contains at least five themes of particular interest, i.e., linguistic analysis, a new epistemology, an attempt at a new ontology, cosmology, and psychology.[63]

In the preface, intended for all three projected books, Vico attributes the system of thought which he is about to propose to the ancient Italians who preceded the Romans and left them their wisdom. This wisdom has been hidden in the Latin language itself and now Vico has discovered it and will bring it to light. It is difficult to say if the whole approach is just a device used to make the presentation more effective and more acceptable or whether Vico actually found the inspiration for his ideas through these insights into Latin words. As a device it is not successful, as the articles in the Giornale de letterati were quick to show. The significance of this approach is the fact that a rhetorician, used to dealing with the grammatical and syntactic structure of the language, moves to an historical study of language, aimed at the discovery of the ideas contained in the origins of language. It is the beginning of that more profound consideration of language, i.e., "the philosophical investigation of the value and meaning of language as the work of man,"[64] to be found in Vico's mature thought.

---

[62] A study of the Liber metaphysicus must take into consideration the exchange of views with the Giornale de' letterati, which forced Vico to explain his thought and to accept as his own ideas he had tried to attribute to the ancient inhabitants of Italy or to Zeno. In Opere, V, pp. 197-279.

[63] Op. cit., p. 195.

Vico is preoccupied with the question of knowledge, specifically with the relationship of the human mind to truth. He is still reacting to Descartes: the "*Cogito*: *ergo sum*," cannot overcome scepticism because it expresses the certainty of one's consciousness, not the truth of knowledge, and he criticizes in Descartes and his followers the unwarranted transition from certainty to truth, the attempt to arrive at a system of absolute truth from the premise of one's certainty in the experience of being.[65] Vico's answer is built on the principle which he states in the very first words of the first chapter: "For the Latins 'truth' and 'fact' are reciprocal, or, as the popular language of the schools would say, are convertible."[66] Vico, at first, may seem to be simply repeating the traditional concept of knowledge through causes, but he goes further, because what he means is that full knowledge comes only by being the cause of what is known. At this stage he is still trying to deal with the transition between the world of ideas and the natural physical world, and, consistent with his understanding of the principle, asserts that only God has full knowledge of the world because he has created it, while man can only have a partial, limited, piecemeal kind of knowledge, even through the experimental method by which he re-creates things to a certain extent. His imagery speaks for itself: the truth as God knows it is like a three-dimensional object, the truth as man knows it is a one-dimensional representation, like a drawing.[67] One of the important results of this view is an eloquent statement of the limitations of human knowledge but, if Vico had stopped there, it would also lead inevitably to the sceptical conclusion of the ultimate impossibility of true knowledge. Vico never resolves this impasse on the relationship of mind and ideas to world and objects at this stage of his thought, but he moves in a different direction. Since everything that exists is a _factum_ of the first _verum_, which is God, it must be essentially true and essentially good. In reference to the human mind, Vico finds this positive quality in the phenomenon of true creativity. There are areas where man can experience the truth of the _verum-factum_, in the science of mathematics and geometry, and in the experience of language. Man creates the number and the point and on them he builds a whole world of knowledge. The limitation of this world is that it is fictitious. And the words, the names which man gives to things are not empty sounds or merely conventional signs, but a true creation of the human mind, another example of the _verum-factum_ on the human level, the human word.[68]

---

[64] Jacobelli Isoldi, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

[65] *Liber metaphysicus*, *Opere* (1914), I, p. 139.

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 131. "*Latinis 'verum' et 'factum' reciprocantur, seu, ut Scholarum vulgus loquitur, convertuntur*." "Fact" does not adequately translate "*factum*" whose meaning for Vico is "that which one has made."

---

[67] _Ibid._, p. 132.

[68] _Ibid._, pp. 149-50; 187-90.

XUM

There is an unresolved inconsistency in Vico when he attempts to establish the possibility of metaphysics, if true human knowledge is limited to mathematics and language. He is emphatic in condemning any attempt to demonstrate the existence of God *a priori*: this would be the equivalent of making oneself god over God, and to deny the very God whom one seeks.[69] And yet he wants to refute scepticism by claiming that the Absolute, God, is knowable, according to his criterion of *verum-factum*, because he is the first verum implied in any comprehension of causes through their effects.[70] Flint sees in this inconsistency a radical weakness of Vico's philosophy: it is a philosophy which has at its center an act of faith in the Absolute, and he failed to achieve the task of making evident the legitimacy of his act of faith.[71] With a Cartesian touch Vico takes the fact that man can think of the infinite and makes it the sign that man has the ability to make the transition from physical to metaphysical realities, but insists that to think of something does not mean to know it. This is the unsurmountable limit of metaphysics: "even if God were to teach it to us, we would not be able to understand how the infinite has come down into these finite things: for this truth belongs only to the divine mind in whom to know and to have made is identical."[72] For the Cartesian subjective certainty arising from consciousness Vico substitutes the objective certainty of the existence of the material world, and from this awareness of the existence of objects he tries to arrive at a metaphysic which becomes an active power as the presupposition of both consciousness of self and awareness of objects. But when he attempts to determine this active power he speaks of it at times as universals, at times as ideal forms, and finally, perhaps because of its affinity with the creation of the human mind, i.e., mathematics and geometry, he speaks of metaphysical point and *conatus*.[73]

---

[69] *Ibid*., p. 150.

[70] *Ibid*., p. 141.

[71] Flint, *op. cit*., pp. 106-08.

[72] *Opere* (1914), I, p. 158.

The theory of the metaphysical point and *conatus* is one of the most uncertain and confused aspects of the thought of Vico. At the present time there seems to be no way to resolve the obscurities and inconsistencies, although many attempts have been made.[74] Vico speaks of metaphysical point as well as points, of the metaphysical point as the principle of existence and as the principle of extension. The following paragraph is as clear a statement of the theory as can be found in Vico:

---

[73] These two concepts are discussed in *De antiquissima*, chapter IV, pp. 152-66. No satisfactory translation has been found for "*conatus*." For Vico it means power, energy, effort, tendency.

[74] See, e.g., M.A. Guglielmi, "La metafisica di Vico nelle sue fonti leibniziane," *Archivio della cultura italiana*, III, 1 (Jan.-March 1941), pp. 23-34. "In conclusion, notwithstanding the scarcity of direct philological proofs, it can be said that the doctrine of Vico remains incomprehensible as long as it is considered as emerging from his thought like a Minerva out of Jupiter's head. But it becomes comprehensible if it is judged to be a concise answer to questions discussed at that time in physics and metaphysics on the nature of matter and the relationships between matter and energy. In this discussion Vico assumes a dynamic position similar to that assumed by English physical science and Leibniz against the inert and mechanistic Cartesian view." *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

> In nature things are extended: but before the existence of nature there was God, to whom all extension is repugnant: therefore between God and extended things there is a middle thing, not extended, but capable of extension, i.e., metaphysical points... God, the source of all motion, is still; matter has a tendency towards extension (conatur), extended bodies have movement; and just as motion is a quality of bodies, so stillness is an attribute of God; thus conatus is a characteristic of the metaphysical point: and, just as the metaphysical point is an indefinite power of extension, because it underlies equally all things though they be unequally extended; so conatus is the indefinite power of motion, because it equally explains all motions though they are unequal.[75]

One author suggests a diagram as a summary of Vico's metaphysical theory: from God, through the metaphysical point, to matter; from matter, a two-fold direction: the first, through the conatus, leads to nature in its dynamic aspect and the second, again through the metaphysical point, leads to nature under the aspect of extension.[76] Perhaps the best conclusion that can be drawn about the ontological and cosmological aspects of the Liber metaphysicus is to see metaphysical points, conatus, and extension in relationship to their mathematical counterparts; since man is capable of knowing (in the sense of verum-factum) unity, extension, and point in mathematics and geometry, this would suggest the possibility of metaphysical points, extension and unity as the process of passing from the verum to the factum in the nature of things.[77]

---

[75] Opere (1914), I, pp. 156-57.

[76] Jacobelli Isoldi, op. cit., p. 228.

In Chapters five, six and seven Vico deals briefly and not very successfully with the inner nature of man. He makes a distinction between spirit (animus), the immortal principle of free activity, soul (anima), the principle of bodily life, and mind (mens), the source of ideas, given by God to the spirit of man. There is a paragraph on creative ingenuity (ingegno), one of the concepts that Vico will use again: by reason of this creative ingenuity "just as God is the artist in the creation of nature, so man is the god of the works of art,"[78] and imagination is the eye of creative ingenuity, just as judgement is the eye of the intellect.

It will be ten years before another philosophical work of Vico will appear. By that time he will have made some giant steps towards some truly original solutions to the problems he has raised. Not much of the Liber metaphysicus will remain except for the anti-Cartesian and by then clearly anti-intellectualistic stance, the principle of the verum-factum, the interest in languages and the appreciation for creative ingenuity and imagination.

---

[77] Jacobelli Isoldi, "Il problema della metafisica in Campanella e Vico," in Autori Vari, Campanella e Vico (Padova: CEDAM, 1969), p. 57.

[78] Opere (1914), I, p. 179.

5. Diritto universale

Benedetto Croce looked upon the De uno, De constantia, and Notae as a preliminary rough sketch of the Scienza nuova, and practically ignored it in order to concentrate on Vico's last work. Authors such as Chiocchetti and Amerio pay close attention to these three books because they find in them many statements that can be interpreted in an orthodox theological sense. Experts in the theory of law have brought out the importance of the Diritto universale in the history of legal thought. And Vico himself disavowed his own work in the autobiography for having followed the wrong methodology, that of starting with the ideas of Plato and other great philosophers in order to understand the minds of the founders of nations, when he should have done just the opposite.[79]

Without a doubt the Diritto universale has value for legal theorists. Flint wrote: "The distinctive honour of Vico as a writer of jurisprudence was, that he was the first to expound and apply in an explicit, self-consistent, and systematic manner the principles of the historical method."[80] And a modern author writes:

> ...the distinctive feature in the Diritto universale is that the comparative method is consciously and deliberately applied to the whole aggregate of ethnographical data known prior to 1720 and is made to subserve a new investigation: the universal history of law.[81]

---

[79] Opere (1953), p. 87.

[80] Flint, op. cit., p. 164.

[81] Elio Gianturco, "Vico's Significance in the History of Legal Thought," in Tagliacozzo, ed., op. cit., p. 330.

This very study of law is a definite step in Vico's journey in search for a unity of knowledge that would satisfy his deepest needs. In the *Sinopsi del diritto naturale*, a short summary of *De uno* and *De constantia* which he circulated prior to the finished printing, he writes that in these works he has labored to establish a principle in which all of divine and human knowledge could be demonstrated.[82] In the same place, and again in the introduction to *De uno*, he returns to a familiar concept, *verum*, now defined as "that which is in conformity with the order of things," but its counterpart now is *certum*, "an awareness free from doubt," not the *factum*, as in *De antiquissima*. Again he is concerned with the function of mind, which he now describes, both for God and for man, as power, knowledge, and will (*posse*, *nosse*, *velle*): these three functions are infinite in God, while in man they are actually finite but with a tendency towards the infinite. From these and other metaphysical premises Vico proceeds to consider both the general principles and the particular applications of law.

The question was not whether or not there was such a thing as "natural law," but rather what the origins and foundations of such a law were. The prevalent answer, which Vico had confronted again in his reading of Grotius, was that natural law is rooted in reason. This answer was not adequate for Vico for two reasons: (i) given the severe limits of human reason as a consequence of the fall, reason is not sufficient

---

[82] *Opere* (1936), II:1, p. 3.

XUM

to establish the universality and the stability of law; (ii) human reason, in its abstract function, cannot fully account for the transition from universal principles of law to the particular expressions of positive law. This kind of reflection on law leads to a new consideration of the *verum-factum* principle. On the one hand the principle will enable Vico to interpret the concept of natural law in a dynamic manner, thus surpassing the prevalent natural law position. On the other hand the realization of the importance of law in the concrete life of man, law as one of man's creations, leads Vico to a new extension of the principle. This happens when he begins to understand rationality not as a possession of eternal ideal truths but as an active power of truth (*vis veri*) capable of bringing forth value and truth (*verum*) through concrete experience (*certum*). Even though conformity to an eternal order may come first at the ontological level, it comes last at the logical level, since in concrete existence it is possible to know the eternal truth (*verum*) only after having made it intelligible to the human mind through the concrete realizations of its own making.[83]

It might be helpful to outline some of the different elements of the *verum* and *certum*, so that their relationship may become clearer.

---

[83] Jacobelli Isoldi, *G.B. Vico: la vita e le opere*, p. 272; also pp. 249, 257.

VERUM	*CERTUM*
what ought to be	what is
reason	authority
universal law	particular law
natural law: the dictate of right reason	positive law: from the will and the authority of man
the universal	the particular
philosophy	philology
idea	fact

Vico's goal is to bring together, to unify the *verum* and the *certum*. At this moment he sees this realized in the *vis veri*, coming from the first truth, God, and finding its expression and reality in the experience of law common to all peoples.[84] The next and final moment in Vico's thought will discover this unity best expressed in history. Here, in the limited compass of the consideration of law, Vico has come to the fundamental position to which he will remain faithful in the *Scienza nuova*,

> ...and this position consists in the clear affirmation of the irriducible distinction between essence and existence, between creator and creature, between finite and infinite, together with a conviction, just as clear, that human existence, inasmuch as it is capable of creating the order of civil society, reveals its participation in the mind, in the rationality of

---

[84] *De uno*, *Opere* (1936), II:1, p. 49. *Vis veri*. *Hinc aeterni veri semina in homine corrupto non prorsus extincta, quae, gratia Dei adiuta, conantur contra mentem corruptionem*.

p. 50. *De virtute*. *Ab hac vi veri, quae est humana ratio, virtus existit et appellatur.*

p. 52. *De iustitia*. *Quae vis veri, seu ratio humana, virtus est quantum cum cupiditate pugnat; eadem ipsa est iustitia quantum utilitates dirigit et exaequat*. *Quae est unum universi iuris principium unusque finis.*

XUM

> God and, therefore is capable of re-discovering, through that same social order, an understanding of divine truth. Any further development is conditioned by this fundamental step.[85]

Summary and Conclusions

Vico spent the first twenty-seven years of his life in reading, study, and reflection, mostly on his own, although he was not isolated from his times and culture, and he did obtain a degree in canon and civil law from the University of Naples. From the age of thirty-one almost to his death Vico spent his time teaching at the university, as professor of rhetoric, a secondary position in the university, teaching private pupils to augment his meager income, and trying to make ends meet by writing Latin inscriptions, poems and addresses for special occasions, and commissioned works. He married and had a large family whom he loved dearly and from whom he received much joy. Vico did not participate in the social and political turmoil of his age and had no position of leadership or prominence during his lifetime.

It is Vico's thought that calls for the attention of the philosopher, the cultural historian, the educated man. It seems that nothing in life came easy to Vico, not even success in his literary efforts or satisfaction for his intellectual accomplishments. His journey in thought and reflection was long and painful: in 1731, more than thirty years after his first attempt at a philosophical statement, he was able to write at the end of the handwritten copy of the third set of corrections to the Scienza nuova prima, "I have completed a monument more lasting than bronze," and, quoting Luke 2:29, "Now you can let your servant go, Lord." But even the Scienza nuova seconda (1731) would need more corrections and one more posthumous edition.

---

[85] Jacobelli Isoldi, op. cit., p. 287.

Vico's intellectual journey began in an atmosphere of questioning encouraged by critical and experimental methodology. Vico's question concerned the validity and the structure of knowledge. He rejected the Cartesian solution because he was not satisfied with a process that ended with an a priori metaphysic. He continued to search for a system of knowledge that would be adequate to satisfy the need both for an ideal, intellectual truth as well as for the concreteness of human experience. The first tentative answer was the principle of the verum-factum, which illuminates the limits of human knowledge but also its positive possibilities in the creation of mathematics and language. When the principle was applied to the field of law the verum became a dynamic force which not only brings forth the universal experience of law but also brings truth to a new level of intelligibility and being. And finally the unity of truth and reality, of verum and certum, would be achieved in history, fully knowable to man because it is his creation, by the power of the vis veri at work within him.

Vico sums up the process of development of his thought by naming his "authors," the writers whom he considers most influential in his mental life. There are four of them, Plato, Tacitus, Francis Bacon, and Hugo Grotius. The passages in the autobiography where he discusses them are too lengthy to quote, and they should be read in context.[86] In brief, Plato looks at man as he should be and deals with intellectual wisdom; Tacitus looks at man as he is and covers practical wisdom; Bacon brings together in his thought and in his life both practical and philosophical wisdom, showing that neither Plato nor Tacitus are sufficient by themselves because they treat adequately only one of the two essential aspects of human knowledge. And Bacon fails to do justice to a universal system of law, but then Vico meets Hugo Grotius who does embrace the whole of philosophy and philology in one system of universal law.

Vico's designation of his "four authors" has caused a vast amount of continuing discussion and conflicting views. Croce, for example, would dismiss the whole matter as the pure construct of Vico's imagination. But in recent years the tendency has been to give much more credence to Vico's self-understanding in the autobiography and to try more seriously to discover what Vico was trying to say. Two studies of Guido Fassò illustrate this tendency in an excellent way and seem to give unity to the complex process of Vico's

---

[86] Opere (1911), V, pp. 25-26; 38-39. In the translation by Fisch and Bergin, pages 138-39; 154-55.

XUM

thought.[87] The author develops his thesis as follows.

(i) At the heart of the development of Vico's thought is the question of the relationship between *verum* and *certum*, between philosophy and philology, abstract ideas and concrete facts. The recurrent theme is Vico's concern for the *verum* and *certum*, the universal and the particular, in human law, evident from Vico's first encounter with the study of law, at least as interpreted in the autobiography.[88]

(ii) At Vatolla Vico turns to Plato (or to neo-Platonics) in his need for the absolute and for universality: Plato supplies him with a clear and precise notion of what must be understood by *verum*. So Plato represents the "philosophical moment" in Vico, his need for an ideal truth.

(iii) Tacitus represents history as philology, the concrete pole of events and politics, the moment of discovery not only of will but also of the value of the knowledge of the particular, the value of the *certum*.

(iv) Bacon stirs in Vico the awareness of the need for a systhesis beween *certum* and *verum*, and suggests the method, but not the area or the subject matter, where it would be possible to achieve this synthesis. Bacon taught Vico the step of the experimental verification of a rational truth, but not the step of the discovery of a rational truth embodied in the experiential data.[89]

---

[87] *I "quattro auttori" del Vico: saggio sulla genesi della "Scienza nuova,"* (Milan: Giuffrè editore, 1949). Twenty years later he reviewed the question and established his thesis more clearly in *Vico e Grozio* (Naples: Guida editori, 1971). His thesis has received much praise and support. See also Dario Faucci, "Vico and Grotius: Jurisconsults of Mankind," pp. 61-76 and Enrico de Mas, "Vico's Four authors," in Tagliacozzo, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 3-14. De Mas criticizes Fassò for making Bacon an intellectual symbol, but Fassò does not say in any way that any of the four authors are only symbols or poetical characters.

[88] *Opere* (1911), V, p. 7.

(v) Vico keeps looking for the place where the synthesis can be achieved, and he focuses on law. The scholastic notion of natural law was not acceptable because it had a dominant position and subordinated positive law as just a more or less adequate expression of natural law. "Universal law" has a different and more profound meaning for Vico: he is searching for a system that will give a rational explanation for the fact of historical law, not as an imperfect copy or an arbitrary adaptation of natural law, but as the concrete realization of natural law, which also becomes intelligible and grows out of the experienced positive law. This is what, rightly or wrongly, Vico reads in Grotius.[90]

It is possible that in the autobiography Vico did make his "four authors" the symbols and the personifications of four particular moments in his intellectual journey, as he understood it from retrospective, but, first, he did not

---

[89] The method of confirming rational propositions through empirical observation. Vico seems to take this suggestion from the title of one of Bacon's works, Cogitata et visa, which he misinterprets as "things thought and seen (or verified)," Vici vindiciae, Opere (1936), II:3, p. 303.

[90] Opere (1953), p. 48, n. 5. In the Scienza nuova Vico will criticize Grotius repeatedly for excluding God from the process of law and for being too abstract. By this time Vico was reading Grotius as one of the ancestors of the Enlightenment school of natural law.

XUM

totally imagine his relationship with the four authors, and, secondly, the four moments remain valid as real elements in Vico's thought processes and as valuable aids for a better understanding of Vico's thought.

It is time now to examine the final moment in the development of Vico's thought, the supreme achievement of his work, the ultimate pride of his life, the Scienza nuova.

Chapter II

Vico's Mature Thought: The Scienza nuova

Introduction

Giambattista Vico, always a man of deep emotions, could not contain his feelings about his last work, the Scienza nuova. There is bitter disappointment for the way it had been ignored, in a letter to Padre Bernardo Giacchi:

> In this city I feel the same way as if I had sent it into the desert, and I avoid all the frequented places so that I will not run into those persons to whom I sent it. If it happens that I cannot avoid meeting them, I just salute them in passing, and when they don't even make mention of having received the book, they substantiate my opinion that I have sent it into the desert.[1]

There is pride with almost a touch of tenderness, as if it were a living thing, in a letter accompanying a gift copy to Monsignor Celestino Galiani in Rome: "I recommend it to you as if it were a child to whom I had given birth, and I would like it to live on long after I am gone, because it has cost me the better part of my life."[2]

There is a sense of tormented dissatisfaction in the last pages of the autobiography where Vico describes the first two editions of the Scienza nuova and the "corrections, improvements, and additions" which he was constantly reworking and preparing for yet another reprinting. But now the dissatisfaction is only with the sequence of chapters, with the inability to find an ultimate form of expression for his thought, with the style and language of his work. Vico had no more doubts about the content of the Scienza nuova, and he was finally satisfied with the answers he had found. On that score he felt that he had discovered a new science, a new system of knowledge which would keep his fame alive through the ages.[3]

---

[1] Opere (1911), V, p. 175.

[2] Ibid., p. 173.

The first part of this chapter will deal with the history of the writing of the various editions, the questions of language, and the content of the Scienza nuova. The second part will examine more in detail three key ideas in Vico's last work that have special theological significance: the concepts of history, of divine providence, and of myth.

I. The Scienza Nuova

1. History of editions

At the present stage of scholarly interpretations of Vico it is not possible to number the sequence of the various printed works that form part of the history of the Scienza nuova, because there is no agreement on the starting point. Fausto Nicolini and Benedetto Croce regard the Diritto universale of 1720-1722 as the first draft of the Scienza nuova and from that starting point Nicolini counts nine redactions of the Scienza nuova. There are good reasons to support this view. Vico himself, in the autobiography, referred to the Diritto universale as "a first sketch of the Scienza nuova"[4] The second part of the De Constantia begins with a chapter entitled "A new science is attempted," and continues with a discussion of the beginnings of humanity and an attempt at an interpretation of primitive history; terminology is used that will appear again in the Scienza nuova, along with some concepts which, in obscure form, foreshadow ideas to be found in the later work. In the third part of Diritto universale, the Notae of 1722, Vico discusses Homer for the first time, and this will become a separate and important book of the final Scienza nuova. But, as is made clear by both Croce and Nicolini, Vico is still not sure of his ideas and the important developments of Vico's mature thought appear here in very immature form.[5]

---

[3] Opere (1953), pp. 87-93.

The most notable difference between the Diritto universale and the Scienza nuova in all its forms is that the central concept of the latter, the unity of philosophy and philology, is not found in its first sketch. In the Diritto universale, the two elements of Vico's final synthesis are still seen as separate entities; he has found the key to the mystery of the unity of human knowledge and to a new view of reality, but he has not yet unlocked the door. At the beginning of the 1730 edition of the Scienza nuova Vico states that he is even less satisfied with the Diritto universale than with the Scienza nuova prima, that there are only two passages worth remembering in the Diritto, and that he will treat these two topics at the end of this second edition with greater unity and conciseness, so that no one should wish or find it necessary to go back to that particular work. Therefore, it would seem more in accord with Vico's own assessment of his works to accept the view of other interpreters who regard the Diritto universale as a separate moment of thought and development to be studied on its own.[6]

---

[4] Opere (1911), V, p. 72.

[5] Croce, La filosofia di Giambattista Vico, p. 297; Nicolini, "Introduzione," La Scienza nuova, 3 vols. (1911), I, pp. XXVI-XXVII.

From this viewpoint the first expression of Vico's mature thought would be the Scienza nuova in forma negativa, ready in 1725 but never published and now lost, in which Vico had discovered and set out the foundations of the common law of peoples based on the common humanity of the different groups of people, followed by a study of the origins of human civilization. His method of presentation was negative in the sense that he had tried to show the improbabilities, absurdities and impossibilities of the theories set forth by other authors.[7]

---

[6] E.g., H.P. Adams, The life and Writings of Giambattista Vico (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1935), pp. 119-35; Jacobelli Isoldi, G.B. Vico: la vita e le opere, pp. 241-44.

The first printed edition was the completely reworked Scienza nuova prima (1725).

By 1727 Vico had six hundred pages of "Corrections, Improvements, and Additions." In 1728 he offered this volume to the Venetian editors who had already begun to print a new edition of the Scienza nuova prima (1725). When in anger he recalled all his works from Venice and found himself left to his own resources once more, Vico set out feverishly to rewrite the Scienza nuova completely, a task he accomplished between Christmas morning, 1729, and 9 P.M. Easter Sunday (April 9, 1730). This was the Scienza nuova seconda (1730).

But, even as this edition was being printed, Vico was again at work on more "Corrections, Improvements, and Additions." A first set was added to the original edition, comprising pages 465-478; a second set consisted of twelve separate printed pages in the form of a letter in reply to some remarks by Francesco Spinelli, prince of Scalea; a third set of more than two hundred pages was finished on August 27, 1731, but never published, except for a few excerpts.

Among the Vico manuscripts at the National Library of Naples, there is one entitled Correzioni, miglioramenti ed aggiunte terze, in reality the fourth rather than the third set, finished in 1733 or 1734, and ready to be added to a new printing of the whole work.

---

[7] Vico, Opere (1911), V, p. 48.

This expected reprinting did not materialize immediately, and so, beginning in 1735 or 1736, at the age of sixty-seven or sixty-eight, "that terrible old man, whose hand was beginning to tremble but whose will was unbreakable and whose thirst for perfection was still unsatisfied, set himself to the task" of revising, and rewriting the whole book. This became the *Scienza nuova terza* (1744), being printed while he was dying and finished five or six months after his death.[8]

2. The Question of Language

Readers of the *Scienza nuova*, from Vico's contemporaries to the interpreters of the 1970's, have been challenged by its literary style and forms of expression.

There is an anecdote about Nicola Capasso, a sometime friend and frequent tormentor of Vico. It is said that when the *Scienza nuova* first appeared he tried to read it and, having failed to understand it, rushed to a physician friend to have his pulse checked in order to spread the word, laughingly, that he had become afraid that a sudden stroke had deprived him of all use of reason. It is added that the joke was reported to Vico who replied that he had not written for bad poets.[9]

---

[8] Nicolini, "Introduzione," *La Scienza nuova* (1911), I, p. XLIII. The complete story of Vico's labors on his final work can be found in this same introduction, pp. XXVI-XLVII; also in Croce-Nicolini, *Bibliografia vichiana*, I, pp. 34-53.

The anecdote may not be authentic, but Vico was aware that the Scienza nuova was being described and dismissed as too obscure and difficult to understand. He expressed this awareness in a letter to Francesco Saverio Estevan, written for the purpose of voicing his disappointment and defending the Scienza nuova because Estevan had written to Vico that he thought his funeral oration in honor of Angela Cimmino was Vico's greatest achievement![10] There is also another letter by a sincere admirer, Fra Nicola Concina, encouraging his brother Padre Daniele Concina to buy all of Vico's books, praising him as one of the greatest and deepest thinkers of Europe, but also expressing the wish that Vico would explain many of the things that cannot be understood by those "who do not have his unmatched genius and his occult erudition and his most unique views."[11]

---

[9] Nicolini, "Di taluni amici del Vico," in Autobiografia di Giambattista Vico (1725-1728) (Milan: Valentino Bompiani, 1947), p. 168. In his notes to the autobiography, Opere (1911), V, pp. 120-21, Croce gives two sources for the story: Francesco Colangelo, Saggio sulla seconda Scienza nuova (Naples: 1822), pp. 146-47, and Francesco Lomonaco, Vite degli eccellenti italiani (Milan: 1803). The friendship of Capasso for Vico is placed in serious doubt by Nicolini, Opere (1953), p. 82, n. 3, who suggests that Capasso may have been the unknown correspondent who sent the contemptuous note on the Scienza nuova to the Acta eruditorum lipsiensia.

[10] Opere (1953), pp. 133-39. In Opere (1911), V, p. 196, the letter is given as written to Francesco Solla. The designation to Francesco Saverio Estevan would seem to be the correct one, since there is a reply by Estevan with an apology for thinking that the funeral oration was a greater work than the Scienza nuova. Opere (1911), V, pp. 203-06.

In 1863 John Fiske was given a copy of Scienza nuova, and this was his reaction:

> It is the driest, obscurest metaphysicalest book I ever got hold of. Confucius is a more lucid writer. "Mortgages" and "Remainders" are pleasanter to peruse. And still it has many capital ideas...enough to keep me from throwing down the book, even while I curse at its clumsy phraseology.[12]

A Russian writer feels that Vico's thought "is expressed in extremely naive forms, profound thoughts are interspersed with all sorts of pedantic trifles, the exposition is very confusing, yet it is beyond doubt that the basic idea is a work of genius."[13]

There is no doubt that the Scienza nuova is a difficult book to read, full of obscure thoughts, unusual expressions, familiar words used to convey new meanings, new words coined in an unsuccessful attempt at clarity, syntactical errors, long and convoluted paragraphs, a style of punctuation that seems to achieve the opposite effect than the one intended. Fausto Nicolini, who has done the most extensive comparative studies of the many different versions of the work, has remarked how they revealed the torture Vico endured in trying to refine and polish his style of writing, changing even punctuation and spelling as many as ten times, and then ending up with the worst possible choice.[14] Even the typographical setting shows the effort on the part of Vico to highlight the main features of his thought in order to make the reading easier and his thought clearer: the excessive use of italics and bold face capitalization of words has the opposite effect and adds to the confusion.

---

[11] Opere (1911), V, pp. 218-19.

[12] Fisch, "Introduction," in Autobiography, p. 102.

[13] M. Lifschitz, "G.B. Vico," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, VIII, 3 (March, 1948), p. 394.

Innumerable hypotheses have been advanced to explain Vico's literary style and especially the fact of the obscurity and seeming confusion of the *Scienza nuova*. Three are especially worthy of consideration:

(i) One of the earliest suggestions, originally made by Antonio Genovese, who was a private pupil of Vico in the last years of the master's life, insisted that Vico had chosen to write in a near unintelligible manner for the sake of the necessary *imprimatur* from the ecclesiastical and civil authorities, so that he would be able to publish his ideas and avoid trouble. This theory has had a long and stubborn life through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. The two major figures responsible for the revival of Vico studies in the twentieth century, Croce and Nicolini, both rejected the hypothesis on strong external evidence, dealing with new evidence on the relationship of Vico with the ecclesiastical censor and with the absurdities to which the theory would lead.[15] But as recently as 1972 the theory was revived by Frederick Vaughan who devotes a small book to the demonstration that the Scienza nuova is an "exoteric" or hermetic writing with "two levels of meaning: one which conveys a popular and orthodox message, and another which conveys a philosophical message addressed to philosophers."[16] Vaughan starts from a passage of John Toland, written in 1720, in which this style of writing is described and attributed to the fear of persecution on the part of an author. The work is a careful analysis of texts and of the relationship of Vico to other authors, but it fails to be finally convincing.

---

[14] "Introduzione dell'editore," *Scienza nuova* (1911), I, pp. XXII-XXIII, and XIII-XXV, *passim*.

(ii) Benedetto Croce, followed by Fausto Nicolini, attributes the obscurity of Vico's style to a real confusion existing in Vico's mind and never resolved. For Croce the basic flaw of the Scienza nuova is due to a confusion of three levels of thought which are not always kept distinct, i.e., philosophical ideas, historical data and research, and the beginning of a sociology. Nicolini declares that the difficulties in Vico's style stem from a colossal mistake, i.e., the constant confusion between the "ideal eternal history," which is the philosophy of spirit, and an empirical social science. Both would subscribe to the idea that Vico was a confused kind of genius, exploding in so many directions of new thought as to give the impression of the uncontrolled power of volcanic action.[17] There is a great deal of evidence that Vico was not always clear about his own ideas, especially the fact that for twenty years he never ceased trying to find new ways of expressing what he had discovered. But in order to accept the radical misunderstanding attributed to Vico by Croce and Nicolini, one has to accept their interpretation of Vico from the standpoint of idealist philosophy, or, more exactly, Croce's absolute historicism.

---

[15] See Bibliografia vichiana, I, p. 257; G.F. Finetti, Difesa dell'autorità della sacra scrittura contro Giambattista Vico: Dissertazione del 1768 con introduzione di Benedetto Croce (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1936), p. 14; n. 1, pp. 112-14; Nicolini, "Il Vico e il suo censore ecclesiastico," La Critica, XXXIX (1941), pp. 301-02.

[16] Frederick Vaughan, The Political Philosophy of Giambattista Vico: An Introduction to La Scienza Nuova (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972), p. XI.

(iii) A very attractive suggestion has been made by Mario Fubini in a book that has received nearly unanimous approval and high acclaim. His thesis is that the Scienza nuova is written with that creative and poetic imagination which Vico had rediscovered in the ancient myths and poems and which he admired. The difficulty in style arises from the unresolved contrast in Vico between his stated purpose to give an orderly, persuasive, convincing presentation of his ideas, and the power and sweep of his poetic spirit. There is an unresolved conflict in Vico between his desire to deal with abstract philosophical ideas and his instinctive repugnance for any word, or expression, or style that is purely abstract. Vico writes more with feeling and imagination than with logical rigor. Vico's prose has "a constant tendency towards the concrete, 'heavy,' expression, a lively sense of rhythm which even succeeds in shaping some truly poetic stanzas, a language construction in whose development the emotional intuitive element plays a large part."[18] Fubini's methodology is to show how Vico's style changes in dealing with exactly the same subject matter, from the Latin of the *Diritto universale* to the Italian of the *Scienza nuova prima* (1725) and through the later revisions: it becomes more free, more warm and human, more poetic. For example, the author discusses the *Corollario sull'eroismo dei primi popoli*, in *Scienza nuova terza* (1744), paragraphs 666ff., and shows how beautifully Vico's own feelings for his material are revealed in all their complexities and conflicts: pride in his discovery and joy in the new understanding he has achieved of ancient men; sympathy and a new sense of admiration for the heroes who turn out to be alive in their passions and human, even though cruel; pain in the tragic suffering of the oppressed which he seemed to share. He stands as in a rapture before the world that reveals itself to his vision, so different from his own, so violent

---

[17] Croce, La filosofia di Giambattista Vico, p. 41; Nicolini, "Introduzione dell'editore," La Scienza nuova (1911), I, p. XIII.

---

[18] Mario Fubini, *Stile e umanità di Giambattista Vico* (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1946), p. 83. The word here translated "heavy" is much more expressive in Italian, and it is one of Vico's favorite words: "*corpulento*," which literally means "heavy bodied," very fat, or stout, and is Vico's way of saying "concrete."

XUM

but also so generous: full, imaginative participation in the realities of human history is Vico's style, rather than cold, intellectual understanding.[19]

This third suggestion had already been stated in 1843 by Niccolò Tommaseo, but not demonstrated and illustrated with rigorous scholarship as in Fubini's work.[20] Reading the Scienza nuova with a sense of its poetic quality does not resolve the contradictions or solve all the problems, but does account for the presence of these difficulties. This third hypothesis is not a final and total solution to the question of Vico's style and language, but it can lead to a new appreciation for the beauty and the power of more than a few pages of his masterpiece.

3. The Content of the Scienza nuova

One of the major differences between the Scienza nuova prima (1725) and the second edition of 1730 was the order in which the material was presented. Vico, in the autobiography, gives the reasons for the changes:

> In the Scienza nuova prima he made a mistake, if not in the content, certainly in the order of the material, because he treated separately the origins of ideas and the origins of languages, which are by nature united; consequently he also reasoned separately on the methods of deriving the matters of this Science from these two sources, whereas he ought rather

---

[19] Ibid., pp. 60-72, 73.

[20] Niccolò Tommaseo, G.B. Vico e il suo secolo (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1930), p. 95.

XUM

> to have derived them from both principles taken together; as a result many errors of arrangement came about.[21]

The 1744 edition retained the order of the *Scienza nuova seconda* (1730) and this is the order which will be followed here in attempting to summarize the content.

After an introduction entitled "The Idea of the Work," the body is divided into five books: book one, "On the establishment of Principles"; book two, "On Poetic Wisdom"; book three, "On the Discovery of the True Homer"; book four, "On the Course Followed by the Nations"; and book five, "On the Recourse of Human Affairs in the Rising Again of the Nations."

Introduction. With the aid of a drawing designed under his direction and a number of pages of explanation, Vico wants the reader to understand the general idea of the work and to remember it more easily. The drawing is crowded with many details, but the main items are the all-seeing eye of God in the upper left corner, a young woman representing metaphysics on the right side, and an old man on the left side. These three elements are connected by a band of light, the symbol of knowledge. The eye represents God as divine providence. The woman is the symbol of metaphysics, man's search for ultimate principles and the origins of things: the woman is standing on the globe of the world, because Vico's search rises above the world of nature to the world of men. The old man is Homer, representing the poetic moment in human history, the key which enabled Vico to break through the bounds of abstract philosophy and to discover the knowledge he was seeking in the imaginative, poetic wisdom. The rest of the drawing is filled with symbols of human civilization, agriculture and navigation, commerce and war, writing and burials, and others, all dominated by an altar, partially supporting the world and the woman, because without religion there would be no human world at all. The background is filled by the dark and dense, forbidding forest from which emerged primitive man. This is what Vico's new science is all about: the beginnings (or principles) of a new way of knowing and a new body of knowledge regarding the common nature (or origins) of the nations.[22] He calls his new science "a reasoned civil theology of divine providence."[23] It is a study of the presence and the action of divine providence in the world, based on reason rather than revelation, and on the evidence to be found in the course of human civilization.

---

[21] *Opere* (1953), p. 87; *La Scienza nuova* (1911), I, p. 11; Fisch and Bergin, *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico*, p. 194. Since the *Nicolini edition of the Scienza nuova in 1928*, the division and numbering of paragraphs has been followed in all subsequent editions. For the sake of ease and brevity, the references will be abbreviated S.N., with number and date of original edition and paragraph number.

---

[22] Vico uses words such as "principi" and "natura" in both senses given in the text. See the introduction by Fisch and Bergin to The New Science of Giambattista Vico, pp. xix-xlv. This is an excellent discussion of Vico's key ideas based on a study of the words used by him in the full title of the 1744 edition.

[23] S. N. III (1744), #2.

Book One: The Establishment of Principles. This book has a chronological table and four sections.

In the chronological table, and in the annotations to it, the first section, Vico outlines the history of several "nations,"[24] giving dates both from the beginning of the world and from the foundation of Rome. His source is the Bible or the history of Israel. Two things should be noted: (i) for the purpose of Vico's theories he needs to assume, although he also tries to prove, that civilization was not handed over from one nation to another, but on the contrary developed rather independently in each nation. He begins by isolating the Israelites who lived by themselves, unknown to the gentile nations, but are the first people of the earth and have preserved with truth the memory of their history from the beginning of the world.[25] (ii) Vico explicitly refuses to include the Israelites in his theories and to apply to them his principles on the development of nations. Partially, at least, the reason for this exclusion was that to include the Israelites in his new science would have placed him in conflict with the orthodox interpretation of scripture. Whether he even conceived of this possibility is now impossible to say. There are small indications now and again that he might have wished to include all humanity in his vision, but on the explicit level he is dealing only with the genti, i.e., the gentile nations.

---

[24] The term "nation" does not mean a political entity in Vico, but rather a group of people who have had a long period of common existence. The "nation" is the unit which goes through the historical ages. It may be said to be the true subject, or protagonist, of history.

[25] S. N. III (1744), #54.

The second section is titled "Elements." Vico's ambivalence towards Descartes comes to the fore: on the one hand his whole system of thought is a reaction against the element of excessive abstraction in Cartesianism and a revaluation of one of the disciplines disparaged by Descartes, history, but on the other hand he wants to do it according to an imaginary mathematical method. The "elements" are seen as axioms from which demonstrations and corollaries would be derived in the following books. But ultimately even the external form failed to be mathematical or geometrical. This section does contain an extensive summary of Vico's thought and many of the conclusions to be reached later in the work are anticipated here. A careful study of this section will reveal Vico's mind and the major conclusions of the Scienza nuova.

First comes a warning: man has a tendency to make himself and his present state the measure of things. This has been the cause of all the erroneous ways of looking at the past, summed up in the attempt to judge the origins of mankind on the basis of the enlightened and refined present. One must beware of the conceit of nations, which makes each nation the most ancient and greatest civilization, and the conceit of scholars, who pretend that their wisdom is as ancient as the world.[26]

Some familiar terms reappear: knowledge of the true (vero), which is the domain of philosophy, and consciousness

---

[26] S. N. III (1744), #120-28.

XUM

of the certain (certo), which is the field of philology.[27] Both the philosopher and the historian (philologist) are only doing half their job if they fail to unite their efforts, the philosopher by trying to ascertain his reasoning through the positive data of the historian, the historian by trying to bring forth the truth of his data through the reasoning of the philosopher. "If they had done so in the past," says Vico, "they would have been more useful to their communities and they would have anticipated us in conceiving this science."[28] How will Vico accomplish this task of grounding philosophy on the concrete realities of life and of making history an intellectually respectable science? By starting with the historical material, and going to the origin of things, because "The nature of institutions is nothing but their coming into being at certain times and in certain manners..."[29] and because "systems of doctrine must begin where the material which they treat had its beginning."[30] Vico will give importance to common sense, and popular traditions and popular languages, and he will concentrate on Roman history because it shows the process of development more clearly than any other nation.[31]

---

[27] Philology is defined in such a way that it includes the various branches and auxiliary disciplines of history: "the philologians are all the grammarians, historians, critics, who concern themselves with learning about the languages and the deeds of peoples, both what they have done at home, as customs and laws, as well as abroad, as wars, peace, alliances, travels, commerce." S. N. III (1744), #139. In Vico "philology" does not have today's technical meaning; it is most often synonymous with history in the sense of the study of what man has done.

[28] S. N. III (1744), #140. At times Vico uses the word "repubblica" as a generic term for a social and political entity, without reference to a particular form of government. It is here translated as "community."

[29] Ibid., #147; also Fisch and Bergin, The New Science, #147.

[30] Ibid., #314.

Vico now begins to unveil the details of his historical picture. The fall is taken for granted and the universal deluge accepted as an historical event. After the deluge one line of the descendants of Noah retained their full humanity and became the Hebrew nation. All the others became like wild animals, growing to giant statures because of the conditions of their life and their roaming through the jungle-like forests. Divine providence, not through extraordinary and miraculous intervention, but through the ordinary circumstances of existence, rekindled in these wild and violent beings a confused idea of divinity, "for the world of peoples began everywhere with religion."[32] Vico had come to the conclusion that all nations have had three "eternal and universal customs": some form of religion and worship, solemn celebration of marriages, and burial of the dead. These become the three beginning data (principi) of this science.[33]

Vico estimates that perhaps two hundred years after the deluge, as the earth was drying out, the proper conditions produced lightning and thunder. The wild giants, surprised by this new phenomenon, looked up to heaven for the first time and thought of it as a living being speaking to them and threatening them. This was the god above them and beyond them whom they eventually named Zeus or Jupiter. In fear and shame, they stopped their promiscuous mating in the open air and in the sight of God, and dragged each a woman into the privacy of caverns, and this was the beginning of the family. This in turn led them to settle in one place, to clear the land and to bury their dead. From these beginnings Vico will develop his three-fold division of the course of civilization based on an ancient Egyptian notion: the age of the gods, the age of heroes, and the age of men.

---

[31] Ibid., #141-46, 149-53, 160.

[32] Ibid., #176.

[33] Ibid., #333.

It was in trying to fathom the mystery of the age of the gods and the age of heroes that Vico came to the discovery of what he regards as his "great principle" and the key to the new science: "that the first fables must have contained truths related to civil life, and must therefore have been the histories of the first peoples."[34] Myth is recognized as such, but not dismissed as meaningless for the educated philosopher: Vico looks for the truth contained in the fable and finds data of history.

Closely related to the question of myth is the question of poetry, because "poetic characters" (or personages) "constitute the essence of the fables." Vico calls these poetic personifications of common experiences "imaginative universals," as the creations of the creative phantasy of nations in their young and vigorous age.[35] In one of the most frequently quoted axioms, Vico describes the modifications of the human mind which play such an indispensable role in the "science of humanity":

---

[34] Ibid., #198.

[35] Ibid., #209; "universali fantastici" is translated here as "imaginative universals."

> Men at first feel without perceiving, then they perceive with a troubled and emotionally stirred spirit, finally they reflect with a clear mind.
>
> This axiom is the principle of poetic sentences which are formed with feelings of passions and emotions, whereas philosophic sentences are formed by reflection and reasoning. The more the latter rise toward universals, the closer they approach the truth; the more the former descend to particulars, the more certain they become.[36]

In the imaginative universal Vico has found the meeting point between _verum_ and _certum_, reflection and spontaneity, reason and phantasy, the universal and the particular: the particular moment, the individual event or person is enlarged by the creative phantasy into a mythico-poetic character which acquires a universal meaning out of the common experience of peoples. Every nation, for instance, has a Hercules myth, which represents the great struggles and efforts of primitive men in overcoming obstacles and taming the jungle in order to be able to use the land for sustenance. But always, for Vico, "the order of ideas must follow the order of things."[37]

The rest of the axiomatic "elements," or _degnità_, begin to present more detailed propositions on the role of poetry and language, and then they move on to statements on law and government as they appear and function through the successive

---

[36] _Ibid._, #218-19; translation adapted from Fisch and Bergin, _The New Science_.

[37] _Ibid._, #238.

XUM

ages. Law moves from the arbitrary will of the paterfamilias, through positive law based on authority and the interpretation of the letter of the law, to the philosophical notions of human rights and laws found to be common to all peoples, thus leading to equity and justice. Governments also begin with the family and the authority of the father and property owner over the members of his family and his slaves or indentured servants; then comes the aristocratic form, when the patres join forces in opposition to the populace who have no rights or voice except what is granted them by the ruling class; as the people acquire more power popular governments will arise, but in their weakness they will set the stage for monarchical rule.

The third section, "De' principi," in the sense of "beginnings," treats of the three original elements of social living already mentioned, i.e., religion, marriages, and burials. The second paragraph contains one of the most important passages of the Scienza nuova.

> But into the thick darkness of the night which covers those first and ancient times so far removed from us, there appears this eternal light which will never fail, the light of this truth which in no way can be called into doubt: that this world of civil affairs has certainly been made by men; therefore, we not only can but also must find its principles in the modifications of our own human mind. Whoever reflects on this can only marvel that all the philosophers should have tried so seriously to attain knowledge of this world of nature, which God alone knows, since he made it; and that they should have neglected to meditate on this world of nations, or civil world, which men could come to know, since they themselves had made it.[38]

---

[38] Ibid., #331.

XUM

The understanding of this passage is one of the keys to the interpretation of Vico. Is the statement to be taken in the sense of absolute historicism, or is it just another way of restating the traditional distinction between *res divinae* and *res humanae*? Is it the opening statement of a philosophy of history or of a new historical understanding of reality?[39]

The final section of book one, "*Del metodo*," could be considered as a summary of the process of Vico's thought in arriving at the *Scienza nuova*. How can Vico's new science begin where things began, as one of his principles demands? This was the exasperating difficulty that cost him twenty years of research, because he had "to descend from these human and refined natures of ours to those completely wild, huge and cruel natures, which we cannot at all imagine and can understand only with great effort."[40] The starting point was found in some kind of recognition of God, which is common to all men. But human freedom must also be taken into account. It might be helpful to see in Vico a theological, a philosophical, and a philological process.

(i) *Theological process*. As the result of the fall man is dominated by self-love and intent on self-seeking: it is the providence of God which guides the selfish activities and ends of man into the movement of civilization. The new science must, so to speak, be a demonstration of the

---

[39] See, e.g., Nicolini, in *Giambattista Vico: Opere* (1953), p. 479, n. 3.

[40] *S. N.* III (1744), #338.

XUM

historical fact of providence which has placed universal, eternal orders in temporal creation. But providential direction must unfold itself "by means as easy as the natural customs of men."[41] For this reason the new science is not a natural theology but a "civil theology," discovering the divine ideas in the world of nations.

(ii) Philosophical process. The world of man is investigated in the modifications of the human mind. But the new science must go back to the beginnings, because the "nature" of things is "their being born." And so the new science must investigate the origins of human thought in those moments when human interaction began. For this reason it can be called a history or a metaphysic of the human mind, with the goal of describing "an ideal eternal history on which moves, in time, the history of every nation in its origin, growth, stability, decline and fall."[42] The ideal eternal history, intended by God and made by men, will be known by studying the process of the human mind.

(iii) Philological process. The data and the evidence for the new science are to be found in mythologies, in poetic works, in the etymology of indigenous languages, in the common ideas found in different nations, in long-standing memories and traditions, in the great fragments of antiquity.

This is how the new science will bring together philosophy and history:

---

[41] *Ibid.*, #343.

[42] *Ibid.*, #349.

> These philological proofs enable us to see in their actuality the things contemplated in idea concerning this world of nations, according to the philosophical method of Bacon, i.e., "cogitare videre"; thus it is that, through the preceding philosophical proofs, the philological proofs which follow will find their authority confirmed by reason and at the same time will confirm reason by their authority.[43]

Book Two: Poetic Wisdom. This is by far the longest of the units that make up the *Scienza nuova*. This book, together with the rest of the work, is an attempt to explain, enlarge, support and prove the ideas and insights already presented. Poetic wisdom is the sum total of the concepts and institutions that came into being during the first two ages of man, the age of the gods and the age of heroes. Vico summarizes his material at the beginning of the book: all things must be expected to be rough in their beginnings, and so he will begin with a coarse kind of metaphysics, a way of dealing with reality by creating gods through the power of imagination. This is like the trunk from which take off like branches all the other activities and institutions: the men responsible for the origins of the Gentile nations developed languages (*logica*), gave birth to heroes (*morale*), established families (*iconomica*), and founded cities (*politica*); they attributed divine origins to things (*fisica*) and in a sense gave birth to themselves (*fisica intorno all'uomo*); they created a universe filled with gods (*cosmografia*), they placed their heroes into the heavens as planets and constellations (*astronomia*); they set the beginning of time (*cronologia*) and they described the earth from their own perspective (geografia).[44] These are the titles of the sections that make up this book containing some of the most beautiful and inspired pages of Vico, as well as some of the most puzzling, in terms of his handling of data and evidence.

---

[43] *Ibid.*, #360.

Book Three: The Discovery of the True Homer. This is one of the most original insights of Vico. It is an exercise of linguistic and historical criticism on the two great epic poems of Greek literature: Vico's conclusion is that Homer stands not for an individual human being (although there may have been an individual Homer), but rather a heroic character, the personification of the Greek peoples narrating and singing their history. Many of Vico's intuitions were restated by F.A. Wolf, Prolegomena ad Homerum, in 1795, and from then on gradually and generally accepted.[45]

Book Four: The Course Run by the Nations. In this book Vico applies his pattern of the three ages to every aspect of human life, and he describes three kinds of natures, customs, laws, governments, languages, reasoning, etc.

Book Five: The Recourse of Human Institutions. In this last book Vico confronts the possibility of the decline and fall of civilizations. History is not a smooth movement of progress. The "savagery of reason" can be even worse than the savagery of primitive times, and if this happens then there will be a return to an uncivilized state and a new beginning. Vico views the Middle Ages as a return to barbarianism.

---

[44] Ibid., #367.

[45] See Croce-Nicolini, Bibliografia vichiana, I, pp. 203, 368; Croce, La filosofia di G. B. Vico, pp. 284-85.

The question of the course and recourse of history is one of the most difficult and troublesome in Vico and will need further discussion when Vico's view of history will be examined more closely.

The conclusion of the work, in a powerful and superb synthesis, sets forth Vico's vision of "an eternal natural community (repubblica), in each kind best, ordained by divine providence." Studies have been made of the relationship of Vico to St. Augustine, and there are several points of contact. But Vico's vision is not the city of God, but the city of man, "the great city of nations that was founded and is governed by God."[46] And although Vico himself refers it to Plato's republic, it is not an ideal state but is to be found in the actual history of man.

II. Three Specific Aspects of Vico's Mature Thought

In the present climate of thought it is hardly necessary to state that the point of view of the interpreter colors his presentation of the material and his understanding of the thought of another. What does need to be said about Vico, however, is that the complexity and the obscurities of his thought open his work to a bewildering variety of interpretations. For example, Michelet, who made Vico fashionable in

---

[46] S. N. III (1744), #1107.

French intellectual circles during the nineteenth century, read him as the founder of the philosophy of history; on the other hand, Benedetto Croce, who more than any other man has been responsible for the revival of Vico studies in the twentieth century, indignantly rejects the idea of Vico as a philosopher of history and interprets him as the ancestor of his own "philosophy of spirit" and absolute historicism.[47]

Some aspects of the question of conflicting interpretations will be treated in the next chapter. But, as this study moves from a summary of the Scienza nuova to a consideration of some key ideas in Vico, it seems appropriate to make explicit, at least in a general way, the perspective underlying this viewof Vico. Vico is seen here neither as a historian nor as a philosopher of history. This is not to deny that there is historical material in the Scienza nuova, as well as statements dealing with both historiography and speculative philosophy of history. But Vico is first of all a philosopher who looks to historical material and interpretation for insights to the problems he has raised about man, man's knowledge, man's relationship and understanding of reality. The interaction of philosophy and history in Vico is a delicate one, and it is a misunderstanding of Vico to subordinate one to the other, as in this statement: "The real innovation of Vico was not that the study of philosophy should be assisted by philology but that philology itself should be established scientifically on philosophical principles."[48] To establish history on philosophical principles is the domain of the philosophy of history, and to study philosophy with the assistance of history can be reduced to the history of philosophy. Neither describes Vico's search and achievement. A starting canon for the interpretation of Vico would seem to be to strive to preserve in him the balance and unity between history and philosophy which seemed so important to him.

---

[47] Jules Michelet published in 1827 a paraphrased translation of the Scienza nuova with the title Principes de la philosophie de l'histoire. See Croce-Nicolini, Bibliografia vichiana, I, pp. 525-38.

This second part of the chapter will consider first the position of history in Vico's thought, secondly the concept of God, and, thirdly, the role of myth in the Scienza nuova.

1. The question of history.

Vico was not "a trained and brilliant historian," as Collingwood describes him, and history holds a prominent position not at the beginning of his intellectual journey, but at the conclusion of it. Collingwood, however, along with the great majority of commentators, rightly stresses the antithesis of Vico's thought to Descartes and the primacy of the epistemological concern: "What we need, Vico contends, is a principle by which to distinguish what can be known from what cannot; a doctrine of the necessary limits of human knowledge."[49] And it was in history, which Descartes had put aside as totally incapable of producing any "clear and distinct ideas," that

---

[48] Thomas Berry, The Historical Theory of Giambattista Vico (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1949), p. 52.

[49] R. G. Collingwood, The Idea of History (London: Oxford University Press paperback, 1956), p. 64.

Vico discovered the richest and most fruitful source of what man can know. Through more than twenty years of "continuous and difficult reflection" Vico first understood that man can have true knowledge only of that which he has made (*verum-factum*), then he identified the *certum* of history with the *factum* of man, and concluded that for man true knowledge is the knowledge of history (*verum-certum*): "...history leads to knowledge, and specifically self-knowledge when it approaches the documents (the *certum*) with the understanding that these are what other selves have created in history (the *factum*)."[50]

For Vico, throughout the whole inquiry, the concept of God as creator stands as the explicit presupposition and foundation. God knows all things because he has created them, and for man the possibility of knowledge, as well as its limitations, is established on the fact that man has a certain creative power and is able to "make things." Man is creative in the historical process, but the process itself began in the creative act of God and continues through his providential activity. God, creation and the fall of man are never seriously questioned by Vico and they are part of a vision of faith received early in life and maintained through all the years and stages of thought. Vico rejected any *a priori* demonstration of God as a foolish attempt to "make" God, and because of his sceptical attitude towards knowledge of the natural world he would not give much weight to the *a posteriori* .

---

[50] W. Taylor Stevenson, *History as Myth: The Import for Contemporary Theology* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1969), p. 42.

XUM

arguments. It was, therefore, from revelation and as an act of faith that Vico received his presuppositions.

There were three kinds of reason.

> The first is divine and known only to God; men only know of it what has been revealed to them: to the Hebrews first and then to the Christians through an internal word, to the mind, as the proper expression of a God who is all mind, as well as by external words, through the prophets, and through Jesus Christ to the apostles, by whom it was manifested to the Church. To the gentiles it was revealed through the auspices, the oracles and other material signs regarded as divine messages as if coming from the gods, whom the gentiles believed made of material bodies. Thus in God, who is all reason, reason and authority are the same thing; and in good theology divine authority holds the same position as reason.[51]

But, having accepted from revelation the doctrine of the fall of man, the norm for his chronology of world history, and the deluge as the event which brought about the division of nations and the condition of the gentiles, Vico proceeds to exclude the history of Israel from the principles and the method of the Scienza nuova.[52] His chosen field will be the gentile nations, because it is there that man is manifested as he is in himself, through his activities and institutions; it is there that man can reveal what he can become, not alone but together with the providential activity of God. And thus the history of the nations becomes revelatory, in a different way, of both man and God.

Vico envisioned his final work as a "science of humanity," and man can only be its central figure and main actor. The role of man in Vico's vision is two-fold: he is both the

---

[51] S. N. III (1744), #947-48.

[52] Ibid., #62, 165, 172, 313.

XUM

maker as well as the interpreter of the complexity of events and institutions which have made the world what it is and continue to transform it, as stated in paragraph 331, already quoted.

Man is the creator of this world through the long journey, the slow movement of the building of civilization. In facing the challenges of his physical environment man changes it and is changed himself; in accepting the possibilities and reacting to the problems of human interactions, both between individuals and between groups, man develops structures, customs, classes, laws, forms of religion and government, the total system of institutions which at the same time are the result of what man has become and open opportunities for his becoming.

If man is the creator of this world, its meaning must somehow be found in him, or, as Vico says, "in the modifications of the human mind." For Vico this does not mean a study of group consciousness or of the psychological make-up of an individual: this would only lead to the formulation of psychological laws, therefore moving too much towards the abstract and ideal realm. Nor does it mean a "metaphysic of the mind" in the sense of Vico's idealist interpreters: again this appears too much as an attempt to determine a priori the ideal eternal forms of human consciousness and suffers from lack of temporality and historicity. In one of the most perceptive studies on Vico's theory of history, Robert Caponigri describes history, as Vico sees it, as a time-idea process, and states that the human mind "produces itself in history and its modifications are the concrete principles of its temporal-ideal actuality."[53] He finds the key to this interpretation in the definition of man given in the Diritto universale: "posse, nosse, velle finitum quod tendit ad infinitum," i.e., "a finite principle of possibility, of knowing and of willing which tends to the infinite."[54] There is an inescapable tension between finite and infinite in man, between the experience of his limitations and the tendency towards the infinite which is the experiential foundation of the time-idea process as experienced by man. This tension is what leads Vico in another place to call man's nature "indefinite." It is clear that for Vico the being of man cannot be enclosed by predetermined structures or laws derived from a concept of an ideal nature, "but that it moves, rather, among indeterminable alternatives, and even further, by its own movement, generates these alternatives."[55] This statement also indicates the distance between this tendency and the aristotelian notion of potentiality which is both directed to and limited by a specific form. For Caponigri this definition of man "contains the basic principle for the radical synthesis of time and idea, and must, therefore, be considered the constitutive principle of the Vichian theory of history."[56]

---

[53] A. Robert Caponigri, Time and Idea: The Theory of History in Giambattista Vico (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul Ltd., 1953), p. 75; also pp. 72-75.

[54] Opere (1936), II, 1, p. 44; Caponigri, op. cit., p. 75.

[55] Caponigri, ibid.

[56] Ibid., p. 77.

XUM

The concrete, historical modes or modifications of the human mind can be studied from different viewpoints. For example, in terms of values, according to Vico, "Men first feel necessity, then look for utility, next attend to comfort, still later amuse themselves with pleasure, thence grow dissolute in luxury, and finally go mad and waste their substance."[57]

Another viewpoint, much more revolutionary and much more dominant in the Scienza nuova, is the one that seeks the modifications of the human mind in the various forms of the creative power of man. Here Vico finds the key to his understanding of history and of man in "the primacy of the poetic moment in the structure of the human spirit."[58] Vico speaks of three moments, sense, imagination, and reason, corresponding to the sensing without awareness, the feeling with emotion, and the reflecting with pure reason of the famous axiom LIII. On these three moments the three ages of the course of the nations will be built. But Vico is not always consistent, and often sense and imagination are combined in the modification of spontaneity, which is then differentiated from the moment of reflection. The reason may be that the first moment, dominated by the senses, passion and violence, is more of a passive condition and man reacts to stimuli, rather than responding creatively to his environment. This is reflected in the division between popular wisdom and reflective wisdom which is a constantly repeated theme in the Scienza nuova. Vico uses both the two-fold and the three-fold division at various times, but the two primary moments are those of spontaneity and reflection, popular (volgare) and reflective (riposta) or civil wisdom, with spontaneity including both sense and imagination, and popular wisdom being expressed in passion and poetry, myth and fantasy, will and authority. And of the two primary moments, spontaneity is the more radical one, the more productive, the more encompassing one "and is synonymous with the self-creative process of spirit in all its forms..."[59]

---

[57] S. N. III (1744), #241, translated by Fisch and Bergin.

[58] Caponigri, op. cit., p. 83; S. N. III (1744), #34, 216.

One of the unresolved questions and contradictions in Vico is that of the relationship of the individual to the group. Vico's concern is first for the "nations," rather than for the individual who often remains hidden in the group. The outstanding exceptions are the "heroes," who stand out in some of Vico's most beautiful pages that reveal his awe and admiration for these examples of the fullness and power of human personality.[60] Also to be noted is the fact that, through his emphasis on spontaneity and creativity, Vico safeguards and enhances the variety, multiplicity and diversity which are the realm of the individual.

---

[59] E.g., S. N. III (1744), #385. "This science...begins by being a reasoned civil theology of divine providence, which began with the popular wisdom of the lawgivers who founded the nations on the contemplation of God through the attribute of providence, and which is completed by the reflective wisdom of the philosophers who demonstrate it by reason in their natural theology." A few pages before Vico had spoken of three theologies, but the third is of a different order and does not belong to the history of all nations: this is Christian theology which adds to the poetic and natural theologies the data of revelation. See Franco Amerio, Introduzione allo studio di G. B. Vico (Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1947), pp. 164-66, 437-39; Caponigri, op. cit., pp. 86-87.

[60] See, e.g., the scene between Achilles and Priam, Hector's father, in S. N. III (1744), #786.

Vico's view of history as a "time-idea process," as a movement whereby the creative spirit of man tends towards a fullness of presence to itself and of realization in all institutions, as the tendency of the finite towards the infinite, is open to an optimistic and deterministic idea of progress such as the philosophers of history of the Enlightenment will develop. This possibility does surface at times in Vico, but he remains aware of the ever-present eventuality of the tragedy of human history: man can frustrate the process; progress is never totally assured because it depends on a human commitment which can always fail.[61] But there is another element in Vico's synthesis, divine providence, which assures not uninterrupted progress but the continuity of the process. Vico's notion of providence will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

What about the concept of the "ideal eternal history"? Does it not imply a deterministic view of history? Undoubtedly this is one of the critical points in Vico's theory, and one which has given rise to a number of interpretations. Fausto Nicolini, following Croce, states that the phrase "eternal ideal history" has two meanings in Vico, one legitimate and the other illegitimate: the first meaning refers to "the determination of the ideal forms, categories or moments of the spirit in their ideal succession"; the second meaning would be an a priori empirical determination of the three-fold pattern followed by all the nations in their actual history.[62] But this interpretation is based on the assumption that Vico's is an idealistic philosophy of spirit, which would seem to upset that all important balance between history and philosophy by making history subject to a supra-historical ideal order. Eternal, in the sense of eternal principles of things, becomes destructive of the temporal process: this Vico does not want. Therefore "eternal" must be related to history and expressive of the continuity of the temporal process. And "ideal" is the end term, not the point of departure, that emergence of spirit towards which both man, through the tension between finite and infinite, and Vico's new science tend, through the dialectic of time and idea. "It is in this sense that the 'New Science' exemplifies an eternal, ideal history; that history exhibits the law of the uniform temporal process of the idea."[63] It would be a misunderstanding of Vico's thought to make him say either that there is a purely ideal order apart from history or that the eternal ideal history is nothing more than history itself organized in a three-fold pattern. Vico is trying to express the presence of idea in history, a total meaning of reality, not pre-given, but developing in history, a meaning which is the goal of history, but which is never finally realized. Man must remain the only protagonist of history: this is the first, unquestionable

---

[61] See, e.g., the possibility of return to primitive barbarism, S. N. III (1744), #1106.

---

[62] Nicolini, in *Giambattista Vico: Opere* (1953), p. 371, n. 5; Croce, *La filosofia di Giambattista Vico*, p. 44.

[63] Caponigri, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

XUM

principle of the Scienza nuova from which one must not deviate. If there is any transcendence implied in the concept of eternal ideal history it is only in the sense that the meaning of history as a whole is always beyond the particular events of man's activity. Ideal eternal history is all that history ought to be but which never actually is because of the diversity, contingency and fragility of human events.[64] There is something at work in and through the particular events, but it is still something working through man in history:

> It is true that men have themselves made this world of nations..., but this world without doubt has issued from a mind often diverse, at times quite contrary, and always superior to the particular ends that men had proposed to themselves; which narrow ends, made means to serve wider ends, it has always employed to preserve the human race upon this earth....That which did all this was mind, because men did it with intelligence; it was not fate, for they did it by choice; not chance, for the results of their always so acting are perpetually the same.[65]

This "mind" is not an abstract ideal order or spirit, but the actual providence of God at work in human events.

It must be noted that in the Scienza nuova there are elements that lend themselves to be interpreted as a "philosophy of history" in its most negative sense, i.e., as an attempt to derive either the laws or the meaning of history from outside history itself.[66] The most difficult area in this respect is Vico's theory of the course and recourse of history. A first reading may very well suggest that the course of history is a law which forces all of actual history into the threefold pattern of interpretation which Vico derived from the three ages he had discovered in the history of Rome. And the "ricorsi," as a return to a new uncivilized state and the beginning of another succession of the three ages, can be interpreted as a cyclic view of history. But these are not the only possible interpretations. Vico recognizes the fact that in actuality not all nations experience the historical process according to the pattern of the three ages. He also applies the idea of the return of history only to the Middle Ages, in which he sees a return to the heroic age. Even as he compares conditions of the first age of heroes to this second one it becomes apparent that he is not describing a simple repetition of events according to the same pattern: as he outlines the similarities profound differences also emerge. Vico's concrete application of his theory to the Middle Ages suggests that his main intent was to find a way of using his categories of poetic wisdom for the understanding of this second period of history. In his total view of history, then, it would be more consistent to look at the two-fold modifications of the human mind, spontaneity and reflection, and to see the theory of the "corsi" and "ricorsi" in reference to the movement from spontaneity to reflection, and the primacy of the poetic moment. In this way the theory would serve to remind the present of the creative power always at hand in man's imagination, and therefore always available if it should become necessary to recapture the sources of life in the moments of decline. Thus "'Ricorsi'...is a reflective process or movement by which the spontaneous life of spirit is assumed and re-lived on the level of reflection and freedom."[67] And, from the standpoint of the "eternal ideal history," the dialectic of spontaneity and reflection is the key which enables man's spirit to return over the past history of the nations and to experience them as contemporaneous. But the one thing that the theory of the "ricorsi" does not allow man to do, neither for Vico nor for any of his interpreters, is to forecast the future.

---

[64] See Nicola Abbagnano, "Introduzione," La Scienza nuova e opere scelte di Giambattista Vico (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1952), pp. 16-17.

[65] S. N. III (1744), #1108, translated by Fisch and Bergin.

[66] E.g., Bianca Magnino, Illuminismo e Cristianesimo, vol. III, Germania e Italia (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1960), p.204.

If this is the theory of history of Giambattista Vico, can it be identified as a form of historicism? Given the numerous ways of understanding the term and the lack of agreement as to its meaning, the question here is seen in reference to one particular form of historicism, that of Benedetto Croce, which he describes as "absolute historicism," and which he claims to have begun in Vico. For Croce, "'Historicism,' in the scientific use of the word, is the assertion that life and reality is history and nothing but history." Again, "Historicism is to create one's own action, thought, poetry, moving from the present awareness of the past..."[68] And he numbers Vico, along with Kant, Fichte and Hegel, as the philosophers who gave critical and speculative form to the idea of the Spirit and inaugurated, directly or indirectly, the concept of reality as history.[69] If the whole of Vico's thought is taken into account, this interpretation appears too narrow and restricted, since Vico only included the human world in his consideration, and never attempted to apply his principles to the world of nature; at the same time Vico did not in any way reduce God to the process of history. Croce recognizes that Vico's religious faith and concepts stand in the way of absolute historicism and adds that Vico should have raised his provident God to the idea of a "progressing," a developing God.[70]

---

[67] Caponigri, op. cit., p. 133. See also Croce, La filosofia di Giambattista Vico, p. 122; and Collingwood, op. cit., pp. 67-68.

[68] Croce, La storia come pensiero e come azione, 2 ed., (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1951), p. 51, 309.

On the other hand, if one is willing to limit the concept of historicism within the boundaries of Vico's field of vision, if the world of nature and the being of God (God in himself, not God as providence) are not included in this historical sense, then his theory of history could be described as a form of historicism. Man is his history for Vico, mankind is defined and makes itself through the historical process, ideal human values become established, deepened, and enriched through an autonomous process of development; and even God, under the aspect of his providential presence and action, somehow becomes a part of the historical process.[71] In this way in

---

[69] Croce, "Perchè non possiamo non dirci 'cristiani,'" La Critica, LX (1942), p. 295.

[70] Croce, La filosofia di Giambattista Vico, p. 135.

[71] E. Paolo Lamanna, Storia della filosofia, vol. 3, Da Cartesio a Kant (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1961), p. 186. The famous axiom XIV, the most explicit "historicist" statement in the Scienza nuova, literally says: "The nature of things (cose) is nothing but their coming into being at certain times and in certain ways..." But Fisch and Bergin, in the introduction to The New Science, p. xliii, explain that in Vico's usage the word "cosa" generally stands for "institutions." This restricts the historicism of the axiom to human affairs.

Vico was taking place "the passage from the humanism of the Renaissance to the historicism of modern times, a revolution comparable to the one that took place in the change from the Ptolemaic to the Copernican concept of the universe."[72]

2. The question of God

In the Diritto universale, immediately after describing man as "nosse, velle, posse finitum quod tendit ad infinitum," Vico continues: "But the infinite being is God: therefore, man wants to be united with God; therefore God is the principle of human nature; therefore man is from God."[73] The Scienza nuova prima (1725) opens with a statement on the universal experience of religion and the desire for immortality, searching for a power above nature "which is to be found exclusively in a God which is not the same as nature, but superior to nature, that is to say an infinite and eternal mind..."[74] In the autobiography, summarizing the content of a lost inaugural lecture of 1719 which is presented as a first draft of the Diritto universale, Vico announces his intention of dealing with three aspects of all human and divine things, their origin, their course and their stability: he will "show that all beginnings come from God, that their course leads them back to God, that the stability of all things rests in God, for outside of God all these things are nothing but darkness

---

[72] Fubini, Stile e umanità in Giambattista Vico, p. 211.

[73] Vico, Opere (1936), II, 1, pp. 44-45.

[74] Opere (1931), III, p. 10.

XUM

and errors."[75] In the *Scienza nuova terza* (1744), describing the action of providence in history, Vico speaks of the omnipotence, the eternal wisdom, and the eternal goodness of God.[76]

This sort of statement can be found frequently throughout all of Vico's works, and these references are given to indicate three important points on this question: (i) there is no treatise on God in Vico, no deliberate attempt to discuss the question of God as he is in himself; (ii) if Vico had treated this question, his conclusion would have been generally in accord with the traditional view of God as found in Christian philosophy; (iii) Vico's concern is God's relationship with man, God's action in the process of civilization and history.

It is in this context, for instance, that the question of the existence of God comes to the surface. The most extensive discussion of the nature and the operation of God is found in *De antiquissima italorum sapientia*, and these passages are part of Vico's attempt to develop an abstract metaphysic; the remarkable thing is that it is precisely here that Vico rejects the possibility of the *a priori* proof of the existence of God: "Therefore, those who try to prove the perfect and supreme God *a priori*, must be accused of impious curiosity. It would be tantamount to making oneself God's god, and to deny the God whom they seek." Vico implicitly rejects any *a posteriori* proofs when he accepts only a phenomenological and experimental knowledge of nature and not a causal one, and he explicitly

---

[75] *Opere* (1911), V, p. 40.

[76] *Opere* (1953), #344.

XUM

frowns on the concept of God as the "potter" or the "artisan."[77] It is true that Vico develops a proof of the existence of God based on the idea of the infinite in the human mind, but it must be remembered that this passage dates from 1699 and is found in his very first attempt at philosophical reflection; moreover, the purpose of the paragraph is more to show the greatness of the human mind and the power of its operation than to prove that God exists. It is also true that a passage at the beginning of De uno could be construed as a demonstration of the existence of God based on the idea of order in the minds of men, but Vico's purpose seems to be to lay the foundation for the phenomenon of men in diverse situation sharing analogous concepts, which he would later describe as "common sense," coming ultimately from God.[78] The question for Vico, therefore, is not so much to prove the existence of God, but rather to discover how he becomes known to man, how man discovers God. He deals with the question in two related ways: (i) one is to investigate the phenomenon of religion, especially in the re-interpretation of myth, and (ii) the other to study the presence of God in history, God as providence.

---

[77] Opere (1914), I, pp. 150, 11, 210.

[78] Opere (1914), I, p. 10; (1936), II, 1, pp. 41-42. See Silvestro Candela, L'unità e la religiosità del pensiero di Giambattista Vico (Naples: Edizioni "Cenacolo Serafico," 1969), pp. 176-200. The author tries to show that Vico has three different proofs for the existence of God, including the two just mentioned in the text. To isolate such apologetic arguments is to give prominence to material that in Vico is used in function of other themes. The third proof is the one taken from God's presence in history.

Vico seems to accept without question the fact of revelation and Judeo-Christian traditions, but also sets them aside and uses them in a supporting role, if at all, in the face of "the primary and inevitable importance of a religiosity, of an idea of God, however determined, which is the essential element of human existence and the foundation of its social being."[79]

Although there is always the risk of obscuring and distorting the thought of an author by making one idea the key to its understanding, it is hard to fault a writer for declaring that the doctrine of providence is the "principle of all principles" in the Scienza nuova, so essential to the work that "to deny it or to prescind from it would be to render incomprehensible both history and the Scienza nuova which discovers its principles," when Vico himself calls his work "a reasoned civil theology of divine providence."[80]

But how is Vico's providence to be understood and how does the concept function in his system of thought? Perhaps no other question concerning Vico has received more varied and contrasting answers. Already in 1768 one of the early critics of Vico devoted a section of his work to exposing the incompatibility of Vico's defense of divine providence and his belief in the animal state of primitive man after the deluge.[81] Another of the early commentators of Vico declared that in

---

[79] Jacobelli Isoldi, Vico: la vita e le opere, p. 367.

[80] Candela, op. cit., p. 199. Vico, S. N. III (1744), #2.

[81] Finetti, Difesa dell'autorità della sacra scrittura contro Giambattista Vico, pp. 69-71.

XUM

the Scienza nuova the term "divine providence" has an ambiguous and uncertain meaning, wavering between a description of the transcendent action of God upon the world and the inner persuasion that men have of the action of God.[82]

The discussion of Vico's "providence" has become more explicit in this century. In his book which has become the landmark in Vico studies, first published in 1911, Benedetto Croce first sets forth his own position: history has been interpreted either through the intentionality of the individual agent or through a causality from outside of history; Croce wants to substitute the idea of the rationality of history. History is the work of individuals, but individuality is only the concrete expression of the universal: it is not a question either of the individual or of the universal as distinct, but only of the course of history. He is willing to assign to this rational "course of history" the name of providence, in a strict logical meaning, as the critique both of individual illusions and of divine transcendence. Then he applies his conclusions to Vico, who is not speaking of Bossuet's transcendent and miraculous providence, and at the same time rejects the individual, conscious purposes of actions as illusions. Vico's providence works through the intelligence, the freedom, the logical necessity of human action and redirects the particular goals through the ideal order. Vico at times seems to say that history is determined by man's search for salvation which can only come from a God outside of history, but Croce sees this merely as an inconsistency due to a theological residue of belief in a transcendent providence.[83]

---

[82] Cataldo Jannelli, Sulla natura e necessità della scienza delle cose e delle storie umane (Naples: Porcelli, 1818). Quoted in Baldassare Labanca, Giambattista Vico e i suoi critici cattolici (Naples: Luigi Pierro, 1898), p. 356.

Giovanni Gentile read even the Vico of the inaugural lectures as a pantheist in the tradition of Spinoza, who sees the relationship of the human spirit with God as one of identity. In this view the principle of the Scienza nuova is "the concept of providence realizing itself in history," and providence is "the logic itself through which the very history of mankind is rendered intelligible."[84]

A large number of writers have followed the lead of Croce and Gentile. The following are some significant examples. For Adolfo Omodeo Vico's providence means the rationality, the organic structure of history, the spirituality of man, and cannot tolerate the intrusion of another providence with an arbitrary power that would render history absurd. Manlio Ciardo sees Vico's providence as humanity itself in its original, universal essence of spirituality, or as rationality and freedom, and becoming integrally Hegel's "cunning of reason." Alfonsina Albini Grimaldi states that Vico's God is "an immanent force manifesting itself at every step of man's arduous climb from a ferine to a civilized state," because "the mainsprings of the emancipation of the human spirit lie in man's own impulses and efforts." She compares

---

[83] Croce, La filosofia di Giambattista Vico, pp. 108-14; "La provvidenza o 'l'astuzia della ragione,'" La Critica, XLII (1944), p. 45, where he equates Vico's providence with Hegel's "cunning of reason."

[84] Gentile, Studi vichiani, pp. 45, 140, 40-45.

Vico's providence to Dewey's notions of God and of religion. And a very recent author, Frederick Vaughan, again emphasizes the influence of Spinoza on Vico and the affinity between them, since both reduce providence to the course of nature or natural necessity.[85]

The reaction to the idealist and immanentistic view of Vico came very quickly. It appeared in a review of Croce's book, insisting on Vico's conviction of a transcendent providence which dominates the Scienza nuova, and the harmony between his religious conviction and his philosophical conclusions. Alberto Scrocca has a volume in refutation of Croce's position with the thesis that Vico's doctrine on providence is in complete conformity with Christian philosophy and most suited to give prominence both to divine authority and human freedom by showing their agreement. On the occasion of the second centennial of the publication of the Scienza nuova prima (1725), the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan published a commemorative volume in which several of the essays are aimed at defending the orthodoxy of Vico, as in Agostino Gemelli's statement: "Providence transcends all things in an infinite manner, when considered in its principle, and is immanent only if it is considered in its end term, precisely as the creative act, as are all of

---

[85] Amodeo, "Il valore umano della storia cristiana," Giornale critico della filosofia italiana, IV (1923), pp. 334-335; Ciardo, Le Quattro epoche dello storicismo: Vico-Kant-Hegel-Croce (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1947), pp. 45-47; Grimaldi, The Universal Humanity of Giambattista Vico (New York: S.F. Vanni Publishers and Booksellers, 1958), pp. 241-43; Vaughan, The Political Philosophy of Giambattista Vico, pp. 44-45.

God's acts in his creatures." In the same volume as essay by Silvio Vismara moves in a different direction which will be suggested frequently: Vico is not a scholastic philosopher but he is an orthodox Catholic in his thinking and he has the merit of having rendered divine providence more intimate to man, while before it had been conceived primarily as extrinsic to humanity, its guide and judge from the distance of the heavenly aloofness.[86] These and other authors in this school of thought pay special attention to all the passages in Vico's works which speak of man's fall and his need of grace, of the special providence in respect to the nation of Israel. One of their favorite quotations is a profession of orthodoxy which is attached to the last page of Vico's polemical answers to the Giornale de' letterati d'Italia. Here God and creatures are clearly distinct both in essence and existence.[87]

The more recent trend among interpreters who want to claim Vico for orthodox Roman Catholicism has been the attempt to safeguard the notion of transcendence while granting the element of immanence in his theory of history and providence. For example, Bellofiore states:

---

[86] "G. B. Vico interpretato da un idealista," Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica, III, 6 (Dec. 20, 1911), pp. 675 and 680. The article is signed Be: Croce later identified the author as Ernesto Buonaiuti, a priest condemned for modernism in 1928. Scrocca, Giambattista Vico nella critica di Benedetto Croce (Naples: Editore Dr. Gennaro Giannini, 1919), p. 22; Gemelli, "Unità di vita e di pensiero in G. B. Vico," G. B. Vico, Agostino Gemelli, ed. (Milan: Società editrice, "Vita e Pensiero," 1926), p. 14; Vismara, "Vita e pensiero del Vico nella sua autobiografia," ibid., pp. 47-50.

[87] Opere (1914), I, p. 277.

XUM

> The providence of Vico is the natural one; of necessity it is immanent, and, at the same time, transcendent; but by the mere fact that it is transcendent it does not follow at all that it must necessarily be supernatural, since immanence and transcendence not only are not mutually exclusive, but rather they mutually demand each other.[88]

This is also the position taken by many of the scholars who attempt to keep both themselves and Vico free from the two major ideological camps. For example, Jacobelli Isoldi understands the idea of God as being somehow included in human existence but not simply originated by it. Vico's perspective does not exhaust the divine essence in its totality, it only considers it as providence, in its relationship to man and the world. But a transcendence that would mean estrangement from the world would be unacceptable to Vico.[89]

Immanence or transcendence? There is no way of answering the question as an either/or choice on the basis of Vico's texts, as the controversy which has continued for most of this century plainly shows. A way must be found to understand how both ideas can be present and operative in Vico.

First, it must be kept in mind that the notion of providence in the Scienza nuova functions as the key to the understanding and the inner power source of the process of law and of history. Vico had rejected the idea of eternal principles of a law of nature existing in the abstract. The common law of the nations arises with the exercise and emerges from the concrete experience of practical law. He expresses his understanding in a definition of common law which he attributes to Roman theorists of law: "Law directed by divine providence through the dictates of human necessity or utility, as observed in the same way by all the nations.[90] Vico has also rejected, as Croce rightly observes, an understanding of history based either on individual purposes or on the purely external intervention of an outside cause. Individual purposes fail to account for the continuous movement of civilization, and an external cause would invalidate Vico's key principle, that men have made the world of nations. In history providence is the intelligent power at work in and through the mind and the freedom of man, a principle of order which brings about events and institutions beyond the limited vision and goals of men.[91] Caponigri returns to the tension of finite and infinite in history: there is a necessity in the finite to contract and to bring within limits the infinite, the ideal. If this is a necessity in the finite, the continued movement towards infinity can only come from another principle, "whose whole operative character is to transcend these inescapable limits of the finite, and to direct the finite to that infinite and ideal term..."[92] This is the functional aspect of providence for Vico.

---

[88] Luigi Bellofiore, Morale e storia in G. B. Vico (Padova: CEDAM, 1972), p. 168.

[89] Jacobelli Isoldi, Vico: la vita e le opere, pp. 340-44.

Secondly, providence is not a hidden, totally mysterious power known only to the initiated. There is no exception for Vico in the need for religious experience in the process of civilization, from the first reaction to thunder and lightning, to the philosophic mind that attempts to find rational principles for the experience. Vico was preoccupied by the need of an immediacy of presence in history between the principle of order and direction, the provident divinity, and the principle of action and decision, man. He sees this intimacy expressed with imaginative power in myth, by which man finds the way of communicating and recording his awareness of ultimate reality. Vico's new science, by investigating these expressions and documenting the ideal movement of history in its concrete realizations, becomes "a demonstration of the historical fact of providence."[93]

---

[90] S. N. I (1725), #14.

[91] See, e.g., S. N. III (1744), #1108.

[92] Caponigri, op. cit., p. 98.

Thirdly, Vico's providence is explicitly and repeatedly asserted to be natural. Vico does not deny the action of grace and the supernatural order; on the contrary he clearly accepts them, but also sets them aside, since he wants to deal with the gentile nations, not with Judeo-Christian history. It is noteworthy that when he comes to deal with Christian history, the Middle Ages, he treats it from a natural perspective, and interprets it as a renewal of the experiences of primitive pagan men. He says:

> When, working in superhuman ways, God had revealed and confirmed the truth of the Christian religion by opposing the virtue of the martyrs to the power of Rome, and the teaching of the Fathers, together with the miracles, to the vain wisdom of Greece, and when armed nations were about to rise on every hand destined to combat the true divinity of its Founder, he permitted a new order of humanity to be born among the nations

---

[93] S. N. III (1744), #342.

> in order that the true religion might be firmly established according to the natural course of human institutions themselves.[94]

It may be difficult to accept Nicolini's interpretation of the passage, that here, just as at the beginning of civilization, human institutions developed according to their internal logic without any need of the action of God. But Vico does interpret the period from a natural perspective. The question should be raised whether or not Vico's theory of history allows the distinction between natural and supernatural. The distinction presupposes the idea of an original nature, given as finished and perfect. Vico subscribes to this doctrine implicitly in the dogma of the fall, but subsequently his whole thrust is to study a nature in the making, man creating himself, which would make it difficult to maintain the concept of nature as necessary for the distinction. Vico does not seem to have been aware of the problem, although some would argue that he was, but tried to disguise his true thoughts and mislead the authorities by professions of faith and orthodox terminology, and others would regret that his fidelity to the Christian faith prevented him from pursuing his principles with full consistency. But Vico does deal exclusively with a providence operative strictly through the natural course of events.

Fourthly, on the ontological question of providence, the unresolved tension between immanence and transcendence in Vico should be maintained. For him transcendence alone would threaten the freedom of man, freedom in the sense of non-determination and creative activity, and reduce man to nature and history to a naturalistic order of cause and effect. And immanence alone would remove from the process of history the principle of order and the power of growth, and either condemn history to endless repetition or mindless chaos, or demand that the mind of man, or the Spirit, be made into the Absolute. In Vico the terms cannot be taken as radical, unrelated, and irreducible alternatives. "The power he sought to designate by the term providence was before all else an immanent power..." but, at the same time, "he nowhere indicates that the presence which he denominated by the term providence is such that it exhausts itself in the temporal process of which it is the principle."[95]

---

[94] S. N. III (1744), #1047; see also #343.

This has become the viewpoint of a number of authors. De Falco sees immanence and transcendence side by side in Vico: the notion of transcendence is not a device for self-defense, but a sincere and reverential adherence to the faith in which he had been nourished; and the notion of immanence is a new growth from an old trunk, born from a deepening understanding of the phenomenon of civilization in all its human fullness. Jacobelli Isoldi interprets Vico's providence as expressing the indissoluble bond between God and man, as well as the unsurmountable distance that precludes their identification. "And if this complementarity of immanence and

---

[95] Caponigri, op. cit., p. 107

XUM

transcendence appears as substantially contradictory for human reason," this contradiction simply confirms the thesis that stands at the beginning of the entire process, i.e., the limitations of human knowledge. And Cleto Carbonara sees in Vico the continuation of the deep and restless religiosity of the Renaissance with the need of making God more intimate to man than he is to himself: this is the kind of immanence that demands transcendence, and Vico's providence is the moving power of history, but from within, it is the order given by God to the cosmos, but internal to it, and Vico's man is the man of Christianity who makes himself, through the action of his own interior powers, but he has these powers because God continually becomes man within him.[96]

Vico's God cannot be resolved either in a creator far removed from his creation or in an impersonal power identifiable with nature or with an absolute spirit. Vico argues against Spinoza and his Deus sive natura, as well as Aristotle, in whom he reads the ideal of God as the potter. Vico's God is a God in history, but the mode of his presence and the principle of his action in man and with man remain problematic.

3. The question of myth

The rhythm of the slow and gradual development of human civilization is to be found in man. The three ages of gods, heroes, and men are predicated on the movement of man's spirit

---

[96] De Falco, La biografia di Vico, p. 18; Jacobelli Isoldi, Vico: la vita e le opere, p. 345; Carbonara, "G.B. Vico tra neoplatonismo e storicismo," in Autori vari, Giambattista Vico nel terzo centenario della nascita (Naples: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1971), pp. 96-97.

XUM

from a feeling without awareness, to an awareness full of emotional overtones, and finally to clear reason.[97] And as man's knowledge and activities are centered predominantly on sense impressions and reactions, or emotional feelings and imagination, or reason and reflection, civil and political institutions, social and economic life, and all other aspects of human existence develop accordingly as in an organic whole where everything is intimately bound together. Part of this organic whole are the different forms of expressions by which man is able to communicate to himself and to others his understanding of himself and of the world. The significance of myth for Vico must be seen in this setting, as one of the most critical and most fruitful forms of understanding and expression.

One of the functions of myth in the Scienza nuova is to supply data for the understanding of man in the remote and mysterious times of pre-historical and primitive ages. In the contemporary division of sciences Vico's insights at this level would be found in anthropology, but for Vico they are part of his historical methodology. Already in the introduction to the work Vico announces his new principles of mythology:

> For, on the strength of new principles of mythology, which follow upon the other new principles of poetry here discovered, it is shown that the fables were true and strict histories of the customs of the most ancient peoples of Greece.[98]

---

[97] S. N. III (1744), #218.

[98] S. N. III (1744), #7. Within the limits of this study and in the passages here quoted the terms "fable" and "myth" are interchangeable.

XUM

In the notes to the chronological table Vico answers the objection that the stories of the ancient gods are not all shining examples of acceptable moral behavior, by promising that his new principles will show that such fables were, in their beginnings, "all true and austere and worthy of the founders of nations," and only later, when the original meanings had become obscure and customs dissolute, came to acquire the obscene meanings now found objectionable.[99] In the section on principles, after noting that every nation had a myth of Hercules, Vico states one of the key historical canons of the Scienza nuova: "...the first fables must have contained civil truths, and therefore must have been the histories of the first peoples."[100] And, by way of example, here is Vico's application of his canon of interpretation to the myth of Hercules: after primitive men (the heroes) had settled down in one place, as their families began to grow, the natural fruits of the earth were no longer sufficient to provide nourishment, and they had to take on the burden of clearing the land by fire and cultivating it to produce grains. These events were expressed in the mythological labors of Hercules: the golden ears of grain became the golden apples which Hercules had to obtain from the garden of the Hesperides, the earth to be conquered became the great dragon standing guard over the golden apples, with scales and spines (the thorns and briars), always awake and vigilant (thickly grown in every direction), or the hydra which continued to grow heads as they were cut off, or as a most powerful beast, the Nemean lion; just as Hercules accomplished all his labors so the hero-men subdued the earth.[101]

---

[99] S. N. III (1744), #81.

[100] S. N. III (1744), #198.

By his interpretation Vico rejected the prevailing view of myths and fables of his time, i.e., that they had been created by learned men either to hide arcane and philosophical truths from the people, or to express them in such a way that they would become accessible to them. Vico interprets myth as the typical expression of a primitive world in which none of the men were yet capable of abstract reasoning, but rather operated on the level of strong feelings and a most lively imagination. Myths are not, therefore, the work of philosophers or of clever priests intent on exercising power through the manipulation of mystery, but the spontaneous and natural form of expression of primitive humanity, and the result of the collective imagination of primitive peoples. Vico is certain that as the result of his work the mystical interpretations of refined philosophical thought attributed by the learned to Greek fables and Egyptian hieroglyphics will be found inappropriate while the historical significance contained in them will appear natural.[102]

---

[101] _S. N._ III (1744), #539-41.

[102] _S. N._ III (1744), #375, 384. See Paoli Rossi, _Le sterminate antichità: studi vichiani_ (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1969), pp. 55-56.

The specific explanations of the symbols and myths by Vico raise more problems than they solve for the modern scholar. As in much of the Scienza nuova, it is the principles that remain vital and alive, even when the applications of the principles by Vico have been shown to have been mistaken. Vico's merit in the area of myth was to approach the ancient stories from a historical and evolutionary perspective in order to discover the ethnological information which they convey. An anthropologist writes on this point:

> Myths constitute a record of the mentality and culture of primitive and ancient man. They have both a subjective and objective ethnological value. Subjectively, and psychologically, they tell us how primitive man thought and expressed himself in his narratives and traditions, regardless of the truths of his beliefs. Objectively, when properly analyzed the myths may reveal to the scholar historical truths concerning the socio-cultural life of primitive man. Vico further insists that through semantic, etymological analysis the scholar may reconstruct the prehistory of primitive man, since the myths contain references, in allegorical form, to significant historical events in the life of primitive man. The latter assumption concerning the allegorical significance of the myths is one that Vico stresses as a major thesis, even though it is highly problematic. The former of Vico's assumptions, concerning the subjective, psycho-cultural value of myths in revealing the mentality of primitive man, the subject of the myths, is one that was later developed at length in the ethno-linguistic theories of Max Müller and in the evolutionary ethnology of E. B. Tylor.[103]

A second function of myth for Vico is the revaluation of man's creative power of imagination in the poetic moment: it is this power which develops both the myth as the imaginative universal and the forms of civilization of the age of the heroes.

---

[103] David Bidney, "Vico's New Science of Myth," in Tagliacozzo, ed., op. cit., p. 265.

A word of caution must be kept in mind: it would be a fallacy to make Vico a full-fledged romantic before the time. Vico is relentless in his critique of abstract intellectualism, but he does not dismiss the moment of pure reason as simply evil or sterile, nor does he proceed from a blind faith in spontaneity and unreasoned feelings. His concern is for the integrity of the human spirit and a consideration of the total experience of man which extreme intellectualism threatens by ignoring the emotional and affective side of man.[104]

Benedetto Croce gave renewed impetus to a serious examination of Vico's theory of myth and poetry. He interpreted Vico as the discoverer of a theory of aesthetics, which is the forerunner of his own idealistic position, by making poetry the first operation of the human mind. Croce says that because the Scienza nuova is dominated by the study of the individualizing forms and especially of imagination,"it could be defined a philosophy of spirit with a special concern for the philosophy of imagination, i.e., for aesthetics."[105] Croce finds inconsistencies in Vico's theory of poetry, e.g., that poetry is imitation, that it is the result of a poverty of spirit, that the purpose of poetry is moralizing and pedagogical. But above all he objects to the identification of poetry and "poetic wisdom," and attributes it to the same basic problem in Vico, the confusion "between the philosophical concept of the poetic form of the spirit and the empirical concept of the primitive form of civilization."[106] And so he attempts to separate these two concepts by speaking of poetry and language as the imaginative form of knowing and of myth and religion as another, mixed imaginative form of knowledge, involving the tension of "a concept that tries to be an image and an image that tries to be a concept."[107]

---

[104] See Caponigri, op. cit., p. 135.

[105] Croce, La filosofia di Giambattista Vico, p. 50.

Croce's interpretation has received both support and criticism. The initial difficulty with this interpretation seems to be, once again, the desire to make Vico too one-sided, too narrow, and too specific in order to fit a given point of view. Here it would be the exclusive identification of Vico's poetic moment, of his concern with spontaneity and creative imagination, with poetry. Poetry does play a large part in Vico's theory because ancient poems contain so much mythological material, and because he was so proud of his revolutionary insights about Homer. But the poetic moment is not the exclusive prerogative of primitive times nor is it co-extensive with myth; rather it is present in the process of human existence as long as the tension between spontaneity and reflection continues to be a sign of its vitality, and when the "savagery of reason" threatens destruction and brings about decline, the poetic power remains as the possibility of renewal; and myth may be identified with poetry only during a particular historical period, not as a matter of intrinsic necessity. With the term "mythical" Vico did not intend to identify poetry as such, but only that of a particular moment of the historical process of the human mind.[108] Caponigri's remarks, although made in another context, are applicable here: "Croce's concern to protect the ideal categories or forms of spirit from the shadow of time is directly in opposition to Vico's robust desire to grasp the idea as it is immersed, breathing and living, in temporal process."[109] Giovanni Villa also rejects Croce's division between pure imagination and myth, and insists on Vico's unity of the human spirit. His thesis is that Vico explicitly and deliberately tried to establish as a category of the spirit not the pure imagination of Croce's theory but the unspecified and total mythical power of representation which gives form to the entire content of the spiritual experience: in man there was a moment when the total humanity was breaking through and being expressed, and only a later and reflective moment could begin to attempt to distinguish and analyze the previous experience. The question of aesthetic comes only with an awareness of myth as artistic expression, under the category of the beautiful.[110]

---

[106] Ibid., p. 60.

[107] Ibid., p. 67.

---

[108] See Pompeo Giannantonio, "La dottrina vichiana del mito e alcuni esempi di miti paralleli," *Rivista di studi crociani*, V, 2 (April-June, 1968), p. 177.

[109] Caponigri, *op. cit*., p. 115.

[110] Giovanni Villa, *La filosofia del mito secondo G. B. Vico* (Milan: Fratelli Bocca Editori, 1949), p. 36, 41-42, 58. See also Jacobelli Isoldi, *Vico: la vita e le opere*, pp. 414-15.

XUM

Myth in Vico is another way of reaffirming the validity of the emotional, the imaginative, the spontaneous in man. An event, experienced in all its concreteness, recreated in song and story and myth, gives rise to the "poetic characters," individuals who are made to go beyond their individuality to become the representation of the event, of the emotional response, of the state of mind. These are the "imaginative universals," the result of the vis veri, of the power of reason at work in the human mind, just as much as the philosophic universals. The imaginative universals may be false in terms of the facts and data presented (e.g., that the sky is a living body), but they are true in their ideal content (i.e., that there is a providence that guides the life of men).

> ...the first men, the children, as it were, of the human race, not being able to form intelligible class concepts of things, had a natural need to create poetic characters; that is, imaginative class concept or universals, to which, as to certain models or ideal portraits to reduce all the particular species which resembled them...
>
> In this way, the first men of the gentile nations, as children of the human race in the process of being born,...created things according to their own ideas, but with infinite difference from the manner of creating proper to God. For God, in his purest intelligence, knows things, and, by knowing them, creates them. Human beings, in the strength of their ignorance, created through the power of a most corporeal imagination. And because it was so corporeal, they did it with a marvelous sublimity, so awe inspiring that it greatly perturbed the very persons who by imagining had done the creating. And they were called "poets," which in Greek means "creators."[111]

---

[111] S. N. III (1744), #209, 376.

This is the far-reaching meaning of the imaginative universal: a true creative act of the human spirit which thus witnesses to its relationship with God.

A third function of the concept of myth in the Scienza nuova is that of representing and expressing the religious experience. Does the imaginative universal, as a true creative act, witness to a sharing in the creative power of God, or does imagination create even God himself? If so many of the primitive myths did attribute divine characters and being to human experiences of the physical world and of social interaction in an effort to interpret them, due to the predominance of imagination over reason, when reason becomes dominant in the moment of reflection and the age of men, will philosophy take the place of religion?

Croce would answer affirmatively: religion for Vico is nothing but the imaginative universal, poetic animism and myth; the origins of religion are not only natural but human, and rooted in an inadequate and primitive form of the human spirit which will be surpassed: religion is the product of man's need for explanatory theories at a time of a relatively poor mental capacity. Croce is well aware, of course, that there is another line of thought in Vico, one which presents a different view of religion, as revealed and supernatural. But he regards this as an unresolved contradiction in Vico, a residue of his Christian faith. But, "The identification of religion with myth, and the human origin of religions, is not only insistently expressed, but also essential to Vico's whole system."[112] But perhaps the contradiction is not as clearly defined and unresolved as Croce describes it. Vico sees the beginning of religious sentiments in the experience of fear, not in imposture and fraud but in man's own credulity and imagination: but in the same paragraph he describes fear and even human sacrifices as means used by the counsel of divine providence in the case of the gentile nations. There is a fundamental experience connected with a basic notion of God common to all men, even the most savage, the experience of despair and the need of a superior power for salvation: this superior power is a God above nature, this experience is a light that God has given to all men, and it is not restricted to the original savages. Almost in passing, Vico identifies one of the common mythical experiences, that all things are full of Zeus, with the truth of the omnipresence of God in rational metaphysics.[113]

One of the key passages of the idealistic interpretation is the following:

> All these three-fold special units, with many others that derive from them and will be mentioned in this book, are all bound together in one general unity, the unity of the religion of a provident divinity, which is the unity of the spirit which gives form and life to this world of nations.[114]

The three-fold pattern developed in Book Four of the Scienza nuova, introduced by this paragraph, is the course of the nations which includes the three ages of gods, heroes and men. The unity of the human spirit, in the unity of the religion of a provident divinity, embraces all three ages. This idea is made more explicit in paragraph 1109, where Vico summarizes the guiding action of providence in the three ages, through the instrumentality of religion, and concludes: "...if religion is lost among the peoples, nothing remains to enable them to live in society: no shield for defense, no means for counsel, no basis for support, no form by which they may be in the world at all."

---

[112] Croce, La filosofia di Giambattista Vico, p. 71.

[113] S. N. III (1744), #191, 339, 491.

[114] S. N. III (1744), #915.

Religion is the key not only for the understanding but for the very existence of human civilization, and although Vico calls pagan religions "false" in order to distinguish them from Christianity, which he calls "true," even the most primitive and mythical serve the same civilizing function. The unity of Vico's thought is to be found in the fact that he does not see the opposition between natural and super-natural which troubles Croce, but only the one providence of God acting in the process of human development.[115]

On the other hand, Vico is not trying to reconcile faith and reason on the same philosophical level. He is convinced that faith and reason move on different planes and their truth cannot be approached in the same manner. He distinguishes three forms of theology, poetic or civil, natural and Christian. All three are joined in the contemplation of divine providence. Poetic theology is the mythology to which he devotes such careful study, natural theology is that philosophical attempt to know God which Vico has doomed to failure, and Christian theology is at the same time the end term and a combination of the other two.[116] It is in this context that the importance of myth in Vico's view of religion must be discovered: "...if man is unable to know God in the clarity of a concept, he has always known him and can know him in the luminous synthesis of a representation."[117] It is through an intimate and interior consciousness, stimulated and occasioned by external events that man creates not God, but a way of representing God, a way of knowing him from his presence to man, both individually and in history, which is open to man, still in accordance with the verum-factum principle. This is the myth, the imaginative universal which takes the place of the universal idea, a moment in the process of knowledge which can exist side by side with the idea, but answers needs which intellectual activity by itself cannot satisfy. Religion is for Vico, not exclusively but to a large extent, the exigency of a way to represent God, the manifestation of God in human consciousness and history.

---

[115] See Villa, op. cit., p. 119.

Villa states that Vico could not remain unaware of the need to extend his theory of myth to the Christian myths, even though these had been introduced into history by a special process of direct revelation. But Vico held back his questioning on the content of these myths, and accepted them as a believer.

---

[116] S. N. III (1744), #366.

[117] Villa, op. cit., p. 117.

This is speculation, but although the question cannot be resolved as far as Vico's thought is concerned, the application of his insights into the relationship of religion and myth to the Christian religion would be the next logical step.[118]

Summary and Conclusions

The *Scienza nuova*, the fruit of twenty years of painful preparation and twenty years of laborious revisions, is Vico's masterpiece, the end-term of all his efforts, and the final expression of his thought. It is a complex and difficult work that cannot be easily summarized or interpreted. The following is simply a summary of Vico's thought as presented here, and an attempt to underline some of the significant aspects of his work.

(i) The *Scienza nuova* must be seen as the conclusion of a long and involved process of reflection which began with the question of the possibility of knowledge for the human mind. Man has only a limited knowledge of the natural world, such as comes from observation and experimental study: it is like a surface knowledge, a flat image of things by comparison with the full knowledge of God who knows all things because he has made them. The Cartesian "*cogito*" adds another dimension, but again it is only the subject's consciousness of his own existence, not the full knowledge, the *primum verum*, of his essence.

---

[118] Villa, *op. cit.*, p. 135. The only evidence would be Vico's references to Old Testament biblical events and customs as parallels to the course of the gentile nations. Corsano suggests the possibility that Vico may have been acquainted with the work of Richard Simon; see *Il pensiero religioso italiano dall'umanesimo al giurisdizionalismo*, pp. 125-29; *G. B. Vico*, p. 215, n. 7.

XUM

Man shares in the mode of divine knowledge when it comes to mathematics, because he has created that world, but it is a "thin," fictitious, unreal and abstract world. Is there any way at all for man to know the real world?

The first break-through for Vico comes in the field of law. As he tries to investigate the mutual relationship of positive, particular law and "natural," universal law, Vico comes to the realization that here man can come to the knowledge of an ideal order because that order comes into being through the particular determinations of diverse human beings, separated in space and time, but united in common experiences. Man's activity, when it comes to social institutions, is a creative activity which is the foundation of true knowledge. And since the total complex of social institutions is the whole of historical reality, it is in this certum, the data of history, that man will discover his factum, that which he himself has made, which will reveal to him the verum, the truth of his own being and of human reality.

The verum of history in Vico can be construed as a philosophy of history, as a way to look at history and understand it, but for him it is first of all a way of looking at man and understanding his reality. In this sense the verum of history shows that civilization is the work of man and, therefore, man in history must be understood through the modifications of the human mind; that man is not alone in history but works together with the providential action of God; that man's creative power is most evident and most active in the moment of spontaneity and imagination.

(ii) Man in history can be understood as a finite moment tending towards the infinite. The tension between the finite and the infinite in man is apparent in the fact that man's experience of his severe limitations, of his selfish purposes, of his mistaken goals does not prevent him from envisioning and bringing forth an ideal order that comes into being, slowly and painfully, through the process of civilization. Man reveals his tendency towards the infinite in his growing articulation of his consciousness of an ideality working its way through time, and in a rudimentary but undeniable sense of a power greater than himself, God. But God also reveals his presence to and in the finite through his providential reality. Thus in the social history of man come together the individual and the universal, the human and the divine, in a powerful and mysterious working together that, while keeping them distinct, testifies to an intimate mutual presence. Transcendence in history indicates a meaning and an order and a goal always beyond the particular events of man's history. And immanence means that man makes himself through his history, as ideal values become established, deepened and enriched through an autonomous process of development. This is the meaning of Vico's historicism.

(iii) In the Scienza nuova the question of who or what God is in himself is secondary to the question of what God does in the history of man. Vico's God is primarily providence, a God fundamentally committed to cooperate with human activity in the creation of history. Such a living, personal, even historical presence in the process of civilization allows Vico to avoid both the rigidity of an abstract ideal order superimposed to the concrete particular events, as well as the complete loss of any ideality in the chaotic particularity of man's action by itself. Vico's God as providence in history is both immanent and transcendent, and to resolve this tension in one direction rather than the other would be to do violence to his thought. But it leaves open to other thinkers the responsibility to investigate further the meaning of these concepts and their implications for the notion of God and of his relations to man.

(iv) Primitive men, and perhaps men of all ages, have formulated their religious experience in the creations of myths. The religious experience runs through the whole history of civilization and cannot be ignored in any study of man. And so Vico's theory of myth becomes a canon for historical interpretation: myths must be studied for the information they can supply about the men that created them and their social conditions. Myth serves as the foundation of a philosophy of religion: the origin of religion must be sought in man's experience of fear and mystery and in his creative imagination through which he creates not God, but an image of God for his faith. And myth is the instrument in Vico's system for reaffirming the value of poetry, imagination, spontaneity in all its forms for the development and the renewal of civilized life.

(v) And, finally, it is essential for an understanding of Vico to retain both poles of his attempted synthesis, even in the face of contradictions, and not to resolve one into the other. The poles are: philosophy and philology (or history), reason and imagination, the human and the divine, actual history and ideal eternal history, etc.

While human existence tends to go beyond itself and reaches out towards infinity, it cannot and must not lose sight or contact with the corporeal (corpulento), concrete aspect of its reality and of its world.

While human knowledge searches for ideas and orderly systems and reasoned conclusions, it will be fully human only if it retains a balance between rationality and experience, between ideal truth and empirical data.

The legacy of Vico's thought seems to be especially this insistence on a balanced view of man, a view that will not condemn sense, feelings and imagination for the sake of glorifying reason, and a conviction that the best way to know man is to understand his social nature and his social institutions, and a longing for a living and provident God, whom Vico expected to encounter among men, or at least in man's history.

XUM

Chapter III

Some Interpretations of Vico's Thought

Introduction

> Kantian before Kant, the nineteenth century in embryo, symbol of the first age in the four ages of absolute historicism, a thinker whose soul was destined to transmigrate into Hegel who is his reincarnation, but more mature and self conscious. And again: a typical representative of the healthy Italian tradition of Christian and Catholic thought, firmly in opposition to the errors of the modern thought and the modern world, effective antidote to anti-clerical thought, to positivism and marxism, a thinker finally reclaimed for Augustinian Platonism.[1]

These one-sided and extravagant statements on Vico have been grouped together and contrasted by Paolo Rossi to show the extreme and ultimately untenable positions to which have arrived what might be called partisan interpretations. As the same author again suggests, the philosophy of Vico has frequently been used, especially in Italy, as a flag and a rallying point for attacks on rationalism and positivism, on idealism and clericalism, as the cultural base from which to develop well defined idealogical positions.[2]

---

[1] Paolo Rossi, Le sterminate antichità, p. 9. The word "anti-clerical" is a translation of the Italian word "laico." Literally it means simply "lay," but in the context of Italian liberalism, both political and philosophical, it assumed the meaning of total opposition to the R. Catholic Church and its clerical structures, and at times even to Christianity and all forms of religion.

[2] Ibid., p. 71.

No wonder, then, that it has become a battleground. Few original thinkers escape this fate, but the battles over Vico have been particularly extensive and virulent, due, at least in part, to the nature of Vico's thought and style. The majority of the most competent and best known scholars have recognized that the equivocal, uncertain, at times contradictory character of some of Vico's solutions and attitudes lend themselves to a variety of interpretations.

One of the areas of major debate and disagreement is that of Vico's religiosity and religious theory, at times identified narrowly as the question of Vico's orthodoxy or heterodoxy in relation to Roman Catholic dogma. This is the area that will be considered here with special attention. There are two main elements in this question and they should not be confused: one is Vico's personal faith and religiosity, the other the interpretation of his philosophy in view of Catholic dogma and its consequences for religious thought. The latter is the main issue here. Therefore, after dealing briefly with the matter of Vico's religiosity, a summary of the history of interpretations up to the twentieth century will be given, leading to a section on the idealistic interpretation and another on the Roman Catholic reclaiming of Vico; some other efforts for a comprehensive interpretation will be mentioned and the new directions in Vico scholarship in the second half of the twentieth century will be examined.

Before proceeding any further, one of the most important tools for the study of Vico in general, and for the subject matter of this chapter in particular, must be mentioned. It is the Bibliografia vichiana, begun by Benedetto Croce and completed by Fausto Nicolini. Several references have been made to the work in the preceding chapters: for data on Vico's works and the fortune of Vico's thought it is indispensable. The first form was published by Benedetto Croce in 1904, and followed by seven supplements which appeared at various intervals between 1907 and 1940. In 1947-48 Fausto Nicolini reorganized all this immense material into two volumes of more than one thousand pages of the Bibliografia vichiana. The first part contains information concerning manuscripts, first editions, all later editions, and translations of all of Vico's works. The second part is a chronicle of the vicissitudes of Vico's thought, giving exact details of everything written about Vico, of references made to his works, and even of similarities to be found in some authors without specific reference. All this in a running commentary which assesses the value and the point of view of each contribution. It is a truly incredible accomplishment, marred only by the fact that all judgments on the significance of any contribution to the study of Vico are made exclusively from the idealist-historicist viewpoint of Benedetto Croce, and anything found to be in disagreement with or in opposition to that viewpoint is either dismissed as of little value or severely criticized. The commentary is particularly harsh and vitriolic when it comes to any attempt to claim Vico for the Roman Catholic "clerical" tradition. For example, in the introduction to the last section, on the period 1915-47, Nicolini says that the popularity of Vico has grown to the point that now he has found a place not only in serious literature but also in three kinds of very inferior writings, "textbooks, political propaganda, and those forged or cooked up in convents, sacristies, and similar locales." And after remarking that with the fall of fascism that particular brand of "slapping the truth" for political propaganda came to an end, he writes:

> However, already during the time of Mussolini, and, naturally, even more today, insults of another kind are being inflicted on Vico and on the truth by another kind of person, to be feared no less than fascists and communists by all lovers of freedom and civilization...I refer to priests, monks, and all their acolytes.[3]

Still, the work is recognized as invaluable. Pietro Rossi and Pietro Piovani express the wish that the Bibliografia be brought and kept up to date, although Piovani states that given the precedent of the Croce-Nicolini commentary, no attempt at an annotated bibliography could escape the influence of that model, and therefore should no longer be attempted.[4] And every author must acknowledge his debt to Fausto Nicolini. Both Piovani and Paolo Rossi show how the Croce-Nicolini idealist image of Vico has been surpassed, but Piovani insists that both literally and metaphorically Nicolini is the starting text, and Paolo Rossi wants to remember with gratitude "his precious work as editor, commentator and critic, and his constant, untiring love for Vico."[5]

---

[3] Croce-Nicolini, Bibliografia vichiana, II, pp.825,827.

[4] Pietro Rossi, "Nota bibliografica," in La Scienza nuova e opere scelte di Giambattista Vico, Nicola Abbagnano, ed., p. 29; Piovani, "Per gli studi vichiani," in Campanella e Vico (Padova: CEDAM, 1969), p. 89, n. 44.

I. Vico's personal religiosity

Vico's personal attitude towards religion, and particularly the Roman Catholic religion, has been seriously questioned only within the last fifty years. To state the problem in terms of the polarities of the discussion: was Vico a firm believer and faithful son of the Church, or was he a free thinker who tried to protect himself, his work, his position, by feigning orthodoxy and devotion to the ecclesiastical powers? The orthodoxy of his theories had been attacked before, but not his personal character. In the first edition of his classic work on Vico Croce interpreted Vico's theories as an implicit criticism of Christian theology, especially of the notion of transcendence, and of Christian history. But on the question of personal faith, while raising the possibility of youthful religious doubts, Croce stated: "All of Vico's writings show that in his spirit was enthroned the Catholic religion, serious, solid, unmoved, like an unshakable column: so much so that it was not even touched by his own theory on myths." He even praises Vico's Catholicity for its freedom from the materialism and superstition that were rampant in the Naples of his time.[6] But in a postscript of the 1947 edition of the same work Croce modified his position and now suspected that Vico was aware of the critical implications of his theories for Christianity and Catholicism, but dissimulated his feelings in order to avoid trouble.[7] What had happened to change Croce's opinion? Some new data had come to light and new interpretations offered.

---

[5] Piovani, ibid., p. 72; Paolo Rossi, Le sterminate antichità, p. 12.

[6] Croce, La filosofia di Giambattista Vico, pp. 254-55.

The first writing ever published by Vico was a poem, entitled Affetti di un disperato, with the printing date of 1693. The poem is never mentioned by Vico, neither in his autobiography nor in the lists of his works. The poem, with its pessimistic, despairing tone, its echoes of feelings expressed by the Epicurean poet Lucretius, and Vico's apparent desire that it be forgotten, have become the basis of the theory of a youthful religious crisis in him. This was strengthened by the discovery that the acts of the trial by the Inquisition of a group of young Neapolitan rebels accused of atheism and libertinism, contained the names of three friends of Vico. Moreover this group had been centered around two intellectuals whom Vico respected very highly, Tommaso Cornelio and Lionardo di Capua. On the basis of this evidence Nicolini suggested that Vico had participated in this anticlerical, anti-Jesuit and free-thinking movement prominent in Naples when Vico was about twenty years old. At first Nicolini judged that, with the passing of time, Vico had overcome his doubts and found himself at peace in the traditional faith.[8]

---

[7] Ibid., pp. 277-81

A second item was a phrase in a letter by Vico to Padre Bernardo Maria Giacco. After noting that the Diritto universale had been treated disparagingly by some, Vico wrote:

> ...the weaknesses and errors of my first youth are still remembered about me. It is the result of our corrupt nature that the faults which we seriously notice in others remain firmly fixed in our memory, and become the perennial criteria by which we judge the good and the beautiful that the other might accomplish later.[9]

The "weaknesses and errors" would be seen as a reference to Vico's involvement with the young rebels and his sympathy for atomistic, Epicurean, Lucretian ideas.

In 1935 Antonio Corsano arrived at a different interpretation. The starting point is the same: on the basis of the evidence indicated there can be no doubt that Vico subscribed to the ideas and was part of the group put on trial. He escaped because his name was not well known and he had a chance to leave Naples for Vatolla. But then Corsano tries to interpret Vico's studies at Vatolla, the change in the style of his writings, the return to the Latin language and the ideas expressed in the inaugural lectures and in De antiquissima, as signs of a conversion in Vico: in great fear, as the result of the trial of his friends, he turned completely to literary and humanistic studies in order to avoid the controversial and dangerous areas of philosophy.[10]

---

[8] Nicolini, La giovinezza di Giambattista Vico, pp. 123ff. This interpretation of the poem is summed up by M. H. Fisch: "His most inspired poem...reflects Lucretian moods and studies in the critical year 1692; it could not have been written by a devout Christian." "Introduction," to The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico, p. 36.

[9] Vico, Opere (1911), V, pp. 142-43. The letter is dated Oct. 12, 1720.

A third item used in developing the picture of Vico's religiosity was presented by Nicolini in 1941. He had discovered an unknown copy of the *Scienza nuova II* (1730) containing some handwritten notations, which, Nicolini surmises, were written by a disciple of Vico, perhaps following upon comments by Vico himself. Four marginal notes make reference to Giulio Torno, who was the ecclesiastical censor for this edition, and seem to indicate additions requested by the censor in order to make the material acceptable. None of these additions are found in *Scienza nuova III* (1744), when Torno was no longer the censor. Nicolini concludes:

> ...at least in regards to the theory of the origin of language,there is documentary proof that, in the conflict within Vico's mind between the philosopher and the believer, the first, after having succumbed terporarily to the inconsistent compromise suggested or imposed by Torno, ended up by triumphing completely over the second.[11]

In the meantime a number of Roman Catholic authors had begun some serious efforts to reclaim Vico to their tradition. Chiocchetti proposed the thesis that Vico belongs to the Augustinian Platonic school of thought and concluded that there was never any conflict in his religious views: "Vico is Catholic in life and in thought, joined together by reason and by faith."[12] Carlo Cappello set out to examine from this premise the trial of the Neapolitan atheists, the poem Affetti di un disperato, and Vico's reference to the errors of his youth in the letter to Padre Giacco. He points out that there is no indication whatsoever that Vico was implicated in the Inquisition trial, he argues that his friendship with the young men who were accused of antireligious thought and activities was mainly social and that his participation in the suspected intellectual circles was mainly for literary purposes, that the poem in question can be explained as a conflict between reason and emotions, not between reason and faith, and that the reference to youthful escapades is too vague to supply any information, since there is no other supporting evidence.[13] In 1947 Franco Amerio published his much more detailed, deeper and more extensive work on Vico, but he is concerned only with Vico's thought and the orthodoxy of his philosophical ideas.

---

[10] Corsano, *Umanesimo e religione in G. B. Vico*, pp. 20-33. In 1956, in *G. B. Vico*, pp. 5-16, Corsano accepted Nicolini's criticism of his theory and admitted that he could no longer maintain his former opinion, although he still preferred to see Vico from the perspective of Renaissance humanism.

[11] Nicolini, "Il Vico e il suo censore ecclesiastico," *La Critica*, XXXIX (1941), p. 309. It was this item that convinced Croce that maybe there was a grain of truth to the suggestion made by one of Vico's disciples, Antonio Genovese, and that Vico was aware of the lack of orthodoxy in his theories but tried to hide it. See the postscript in the 1947 (and subsequent) edition of *La filosofia di Giambattista Vico*, p. 280.

In 1949 Fausto Nicolini entered the discussion again to restate and strengthen his thesis. Of the four essays in the book the first is on the question of Vico's religiosity, the other three on doctrinal points which had been the subject of debate. In the essay on the youthful religious crisis of Vico, Nicolini argues successfully against Corsano's thesis, expands on the question of the relationship of Vico to his ecclesiastical censor, minimizing his role and his competence, and concluding that the crisis in Vico came not in his youth but after 1715, that it was not an emotional crisis of faith but a change to an anti-intellectualistic stance in his philosophy and that the irreligious theories of the atheists on trial reappear in more reasoned form and at times dressed up as Christian ideas in the *Scienza nuova*.[14] A new item of evidence is presented: four passages in Vico's *Principum neapolitanorum coniurationis historia*, where he is very critical of the wealth, the power and the political interference of friars and clergy in the abortive conspiracy to overthrow the Spanish rule. Nicolini concludes that Vico had anti-clerical feelings and that his expressions of friendship and respect for prelates and clergy were motivated by political and practical reasons of survival.[15] Amerio entered again into the debate, emphasizing that the question of orthodoxy must deal with ideas and theories, not with personal feelings, but this time he discussed Vico's religiosity, repeating the conclusions of Cappello, already mentioned, and adding replies to Nicolini's new arguments: the anti-clerical passages are explained as legitimate criticism of clerical abuses and calls for reform; the marginal notes attributing changes to the ecclesiastical censor are shown to be in matters of chronology still open to debate and not in matters of dogma, and a comparison of one of the passages in the 1744 Scienza nuova shows that the passage has become even more orthodox than the addition by the censor: the confusion of languages for the descendants of Sem is attributed to a miraculous event.[16]

---

[12] Chiocchetti, La filosofia di G. B. Vico, p. 198.

[13] Carlo Cappello, "G. B. Vico e il processo contro gli 'ateisti,'" Salesianum, VIII, 3-4 (July-Dec., 1946), pp. 326-42. It must be said that his evidence is very conjectural and not very convincing, except for the suggestion that the poem does not have to be explained on the basis of a religious crisis.

---

[14] Nicolini, *La religiosità di Giambattista Vico: quattro saggi* (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1949), pp. 49-50.

[15] *Ibid.*, pp. 32-44. Again, it must be noted that Vico makes no mention of his history of the conspiracy, either in the autobiography or in his lists of works. Two reasons may be suggested: one, it was never published during his lifetime and, two, the political climate had changed.

The debate outlined above stimulated deeper studies into the whole question of the religiosity of Vico, but the more Vico was examined in his own time, the more scholars were inclined to return to Croce's original opinion and to see religion as both a vital experience for Vico and a central theme of his works. By way of example here is Corsano's assessment in 1956:

> ...the most recent studies have dispersed a great deal of the suspicion that surrounded the presumed youthful crisis, forcing us to accept the sincerity of his religious attitude in general, and consequently, even in the time of his youth.[17]

Perhaps the following observations will help to bring the question into proper perspective:

(i) The Inquisition trial, 1688-1692, to a certain extent has been blown out of proportion. It should be seen more as part of the political struggle between Church and State in Naples rather than a doctrinal crisis. It may have begun as a miscalculated power play for the purpose of regaining authority by the local curial party. As soon as it was announced public opinion reacted so violently against it, under the leadership of the local civil government, that negotiations were begun in Rome to reach a compromise that would save face. The jurisdiction was transferred from the special tribunal of the Roman Inquisition to the local archdiocesan tribunal; the more prominent among the accused were quietly freed from prison, and the whole matter would have been forgotten, except that Cardinal Archbishop Cantelmo, decided on a grandstand play, called together the people in the Cathedral without any forewarning and there solemnly excommunicated two minor participants who still were in prison.[18]

---

[16] Franco Amerio, "Critici cattolici e critici non-cattolici di G. B. Vico," Giornale di metafisica, VII, 6 (Nov.-Dec., 1952), pp. 727-32.

[17] Corsano, G. B. Vico, p. 10.

(ii) The poem Affetti di un disperato can be understood just as well as an outpouring of personal grief and despair. Vico was at Vatolla, away from his family, in poor health, immersed in a personal search for knowledge and coherence, perhaps uncertain about his future. Vico himself did not see it in the light of the ideas which had brought his friends under the power of the Inquisition: he dedicated it to Domenico Rocca, the pious and religious gentleman at whose house he was staying, whose brother was the bishop who had obtained the position for Vico, and he published it in 1693, when sentiments over the trial were still running strong and the struggle between the curia and the anti-curialist party was still raging.[19]

---

[18] See Nicolini, La religiosità di Giambattista Vico, pp. 23-25; La giovinezza di G. B. Vico, p. 80; Autobiografia di Giambattista Vico (Bompiani), pp. 211-218.

(iii) There is not sufficient evidence to determine the meaning of Vico's reference to the errors and weaknesses of his youth in the letter to Padre Giacchi. One view is as conjectural as the other.

(iv) The marginal references to the ecclesiastical censor do suggest some questions or scruples on the part of Giulio Torno, the censor, but the passages are not of great consequence, and at least one of the additions introduces an obvious contradiction in the paragraph so that two opposite opinions are left one after the other. These notes give no indication of the personal attitudes of Vico.

(v) The anti-clerical passages in the history of the Macchia conspiracy are strong condemnations of existing abuses. If they are understood as signs of Vico's anti-clerical attitudes, they must be taken together with the many signs of sincere and treasured affection, respect, and lifelong friendships that he maintained and cultivated with priests and religious, such as Padre Giacchi. It would seem extremely difficult to interpret all these incidents and expressions as opportunistic adulation calculated to protect him from trouble. This kind of dishonesty seems to all students of Vico incompatible with Vico's total character.

---

[19] See Cappello, op. cit., pp. 340-41.

(vi) More attention should be paid to some of the minor writings. For example, the eulogy for donn'Angela Cimmino, Marchesa della Petrella, was written in 1726; the deceased was a very dear friend of Vico, she had been his student, and after her marriage Vico was a frequent visitor at her house where some of the best intellectuals gathered every evening for conversation and study. There would seem to be no room for ulterior motives in the writing of this eulogy: it is just a teacher and friend expressing his deep feelings of admiration and loss at the death of a remarkable woman. A careful reading also shows deep and sincere religious feelings: if the poem Affetti di un disperato could not have been written by a devoted Christian, as M. H. Fisch suggested, the eulogy for Angela Cimmino could only have been written by a Christian of deep piety.[20]

For these reasons it seems best to conclude that the question of Vico's personal religious attitude cannot be settled with complete certainty, but that, in view of all the evidence now available, the signs of his religious faith and the explicit professions of fidelity and devotion to Christianity and the Catholic Church should be accepted as true and sincere and valid throughout his whole life, even though he may have experienced some kind of religious crisis or doubts in his youth.

---

[20] Opere (1953), pp. 1009-31, especially pp. 1029-31.

II. Interpretations of Vico's religious thought to 1900

The full story of the acceptance, the misunderstandings, the appropriation of Vico's thought for the sake of various causes is much too complicated and extensive to be summarized in a few pages. The story has been told many times, very competently, and from a number of perspectives. But since the purpose of this study is to look at Vico from a theological perspective, it is of interest to examine briefly the history of the theological controversies that have accompanied the spread of Vico's thought.[21]

It is not possible to reach a definitive conclusion on the question of the acceptance of Vico during his own lifetime and the attitudes of his contemporaries towards him. He was ignored, more than misunderstood or attacked. He was loved and admired by his friends and by some of his students more as a person and teacher than as an original thinker: the evidence available makes it plain that neither friends nor disciples had understood the complexity and originality of his thought. Vico's bitterness and humiliation came from the realization that he was denied not only wholehearted acceptance and comprehension but also the kind of hostility and controversy that comes from taking an author's work seriously.[22]

---

[21] Besides the Croce-Nicolini *Bibliografia vichiana*, for the story of the influence and interpretation of Vico's works, see M. H. Fisch, "Introduction," to *The Autobiography*, pp. 61-107, especially valuable for Great Britain and the United States of America; Tagliacozzo, ed., *Giambattista Vico: An International Symposium*, Part II, "Vico's Influence of Western Thought and Letters," pp. 147-255; Jules Chaix-Ruy, "La fortune de J. B. Vico," in *Campanella e Vico* (Padova: CEDAM, 1969), pp. 123-52, especially on France. For the history of the theological controversies a valuable document is Baldassare Labanca, *Giambattista Vico e i suoi critici cattolici* (Naples: Luigi Pierro, Tip. editore, 1898). Labanca writes from a 19th century positivistic viewpoint.

There is one slight indication that some of the opposition encountered by Vico from his contemporaries may have been concerning the orthodoxy of his ideas. In the same letter to Padre Giacchi in which he mentions his youthful errors, Vico makes reference to some "evil learned men" who are fomenting "mortal hatreds against him"; on the pretext of "sustaining the authority of the past," these critical voices are colored by a "false piety intended to hide a cruel desire to overwhelm me with the kind of clever tricks always used by those who want to hold on at all cost to ancient opinions (that are really their own) in order to ruin those who have made new intellectual discoveries."[23] Both Labanca and Nicolini assume that the "evil learned men" of false piety were Catholic critics of Vico, and Nicolini infers that this opposition may have been one of the circumstances that resulted in the closer scrutiny by the censor of the 1730 edition of the _Scienza nuova._[24] This may be the best interpretation, but it must also be observed that Vico's letter is dated October 12, 1720; at that time only the _Sinopsi_ and the _De_ uno had been published and it is difficult to see what could be considered objectionable in these two works. Even if the Diritto universale is considered a first draft of the Scienza nuova, the best argument for this position is the second part, De Constantia, published in 1721. It must also be kept in mind that both Nicolini and Labanca are intent on discovering every possible instance of criticism by Catholics of Vico's orthodoxy.

---

[22] See Jacobelli Isoldi, _G. B. Vico: la vita e le opere_, pp. 427-31.

[23] Vico, _Opere_ (1911), V, p. 143.

[24] Labanca, _op. cit._, pp. 13, 26, 447-53; Croce-Nicolini, _Bibliografia vichiana, I_, pp. 187-89; Nicolini, _La religiosità di Giambattista Vico_, pp. 61-62.

Chronologically, the first critic of Vico's orthodoxy who can be identified and whose works are available is Damiano Romano from Naples. He was a strange combination of a fanatically devout Roman Catholic with violent anti-curia feelings: he proclaimed his faith, devotion and adherence to all the doctrines of the Church, and in connection with Vico he mentions a medieval monk whose remains were taken from the tomb, burned and scattered, after he was condemned for his veiled pantheism, as if to suggest that the same treatment should be given to Vico. But he also opposed any political interference from the clergy and worked wholeheartedly for the deliverance of the civil government from any subjection to the Roman curia. Romano wrote three books that attack Vico: the first two published in 1736 and 1744 are on the subject of the Twelve Tables of Roman law, the third is against Vico's theory on the origin of language, and was published in 1749. Vico had proposed that the first stage of communication among men was by means of signs, gestures, and inarticulate sounds. Romano calls this opinion not only "old and rancid," but also ridiculous and false, and proceeds to demonstrate the contrary on the basis of the Bible narratives of Adam, Noah, and the Tower of Babel. Romano becomes more violent in condemning Vico's theory of myth as a narrative containing truths of the history of civilization, and calls Vico's reasoning strange and stupid. Finally, he categorically denies the possibility of a savage state of man at the beginning of civilization, on the basis of the authority of Scripture.

Romano is regarded as a learned man, with a great deal of erudition poorly assimilated, who wrote profusely on a variety of subjects without much originality. His criticism of Vico stands out more for the aggressive tone and the intemperate language than for logical reasoning and critical power. He is worth remembering as the first critic to attack Vico on the points that will become the most frequent objections to Vico's orthodoxy.[25]

The theory on the origin of civilization proposed in the Scienza nuova became the focus of the major controversy on the orthodoxy of Vico's thought in the eighteenth century. The theory centered on the hypothesis that the founders of the gentile nations were at one time roaming the forests like savage beasts.[26] The controversy rose around Emmanuele Duni

---

[25] Labanca, op. cit., pp. 116-41; Croce-Nicolini, Bibliografia vichiana, I, pp. 233-35.

[26] Vico's phrase is "erramento ferino," translated as "savage state." It seems a better way of conveying the idea in English than the literal "ferine roaming." The controversy raged at the University of Rome between two groups called "ferini" and "anti-ferini."

(1716-1781), a professor of law first at the Sapienza and later at the University of Rome, who had been a disciple of Vico and who constantly uttered the most obnoxious kind of adulation for his former teacher. Nicolini remarks that if Vico had still been alive, even with his great desire for praise, he would have asked Duni to sing his praises on a lower pitch.[27] In 1760 Duni published an essay on universal jurisprudence in which he makes constant reference to Vico and gets carried away in his admiration for the theory of the primitive savage state of man. This annoyed Bonifacio Finetti (1705-1782),[28] who replied, in 1765, in a book on natural law, using the last chapter to refute both the *Scienza nuova* and Duni's book, from a Catholic viewpoint. Within the same year Duni was ready with a reply to Finetti filled with exaggerated assertions on the orthodoxy of the theory. In 1768 Finetti answered with an "Apology for the human race accused of having been once a wild beast: part one, in which the falsity of the animal state of ancient men is demonstrated. Opus that can serve as an appendix to

---

[27] Nicolini, *La religiosità di Giambattista Vico*, p. 11.

[28] The confusion of the name of this Dominican priest from Friuli was not fully cleared until 1936. His baptismal name was Germano Federico Finetti; in religion he took the name Bonifacio Finetti; in the *Apologia* he used a classicist pseudonym, Filandro Misoterio ("friend of man and enemy of beasts"), and identified himself as Giovan Francesco Finetti, who was his brother. See Labanca, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-11, who still attributes the book to Giovanni Francesco; Croce, "Nota intorno al Finetti," in the 1936 reprint of G. F. Finetti, *Difesa dell'autorità della sacra scrittura contro Giambattista Vico*, pp. 89-91. This is Croce's title, not Finetti's.

XUM

De iure naturali et gentium by Signor G. F. Finetti." Duni did not reply, and neither did Finetti ever publish the announced parts two and three of the Apology. Labanca surmises that the ecclesiastical authority intervened to end this embarrassing argument between a respected professor of the University of Rome and a religious of high reputation.[29] But the controversy has reached the twentieth century through the work of Benedetto Croce and the reaction of the Catholic supporters of Vico. Croce regarded Finetti's book important enough to edit a reprint of its main parts, in 1936. He gives this reason:

> The protest of eighteenth century Catholic criticism against the doctrines of Vico, an author regarded by everyone as an irreproachable and practicing believer during his whole life, has great importance because it is the first true recognition of the revolutionary, anti-Catholic and generally anti-religious spirit that shaped those doctrines.[30]

Finetti does not intend to disturb the ashes of the pious Vico, but he cannot let go unchallenged Duni's proclamation of Vico as the "master of all philosophers." In his estimate of Vico's personal character, Finetti is the first to mention, and to reject, the notion that Vico's obscure style was intended to mislead the censors and his orthodox critics; he also mentions and dismisses, though not entirely, the rumors that Vico was mad; and he concludes that he was a man of great intelligence and greater imagination but of poor judgment. Finetti's thesis is that Vico's theory on the origin of civilization is contrary and harmful to Sacred Scripture, blasphemous of God as divine providence, and conducive to libertinism. His method is to show that chapters nine, ten and eleven of Genesis contradict Vico's theory, and then to draw the logical corollaries from Vico's hypotheses that would be destructive of religion and good morals. He begins by contrasting twenty-three propositions by Vico, with statements from Genesis, taken as facts related by Moses, the sacred historian. In the first section, he discusses in detail eight conclusions of the Scienza nuova concerned mainly with the manner by which men could have fallen in this state of savagery similar to the wild beasts after the deluge. In the second section he demonstrates the falsity of Vico's conclusions on the basis of the three chapters of Genesis already mentioned, while in the next section he shows their incompatibility with other data of Scripture. Finally he shows the dangers lurking in such a view of humanity: all of Vico's reverence for divine providence is destroyed by the idea that God could have let man become like a beast; all religious traditions would have been lost and religion would become a simply natural phenomenon; there is no difference between men and animals and the acceptance of a purely material condition for primitive man gives support to those who claim that man has no spiritual nature. By way of summary, the following quotation on the question of providence is indicative of Finetti's thinking and style:

---

[29] Labanca, op. cit., p. 10; Croce-Nicolini, Bibliografia vichiana, I, pp. 265-66.

[30] Croce, "Introduzione," to G. F. Finetti, Difesa, p. XII.

> ...what could be harder and more difficult to reconcile with the idea we have of Providence than to imagine that the Lord, having preserved mankind from total destruction in such a marvelous way in the Ark, would have immediately abandoned humanity to such an extent that it would be reduced to an animal state, having lost all religion, lost the use of reason, lost all languages, lost all companionship, having lost, in short, its humanness, and falling into a savage state even worse than the condition of animals?[31]

Given a literal interpretation of the Pentateuch, Finetti builds a strong case against Vico, and he has some remarkable insights and foresights. He sees that Vico's distinction between sacred and profane history, between the history of the Gentiles and the history of Israel, is impossible to maintain and that Vico failed to do so consistently. He foresees that Vico's theory of myth could be applied to the Bible, with upsetting results: if Homer stands for the tradition of the Greek peoples and his work is a collection of poems gathered over a long period of time, what is to prevent someone else from applying this theory to biblical figures, Moses for instance? Writing in 1898 Labanca could point out that what Finetti had feared had already happened, and he mentions Reimarus, Eichorn, and Paulus.[32] And the fact that Croce and Nicolini, in 1936, 1941, and 1947, could think that Finetti's criticism was a telling blow against Catholic apologists and a major argument in support of their thesis of the heterodoxy of Vico's thought, must be seen in the light

---

[31] Finetti, Difesa, p. 69.

[32] Labanca, op. cit., p. 201.

XUM

of the fact that it was not until 1943 that the encyclical Divino Afflante Spiritu officially opened the door of biblical criticism to Roman Catholic scripture scholars.

A brief mention will suffice for two other critics of Vico's theories in the eighteenth century. Giovan Donato Rogadeo (1718-1784) treats Vico with respect in his history of the kingdom of Naples but refuses to accept the hypothesis of the savage state of primitive man and remarks that Vico, as a devout believer, should not have proposed it.[33] Better known is a faithful disciple of Vico, Antonio Genovese (1712-1769), who by his own writings and teaching as well as through his own students was instrumental in the spread of Vico's fame: he also rejects the theory of the origin of civilization from wild savages.[34]

The nineteenth century produces one more critic in the style of the previous century, Francesco Colangelo, bishop of Castellammare di Stabia and well known apologist for the Christian faith and the Catholic Church. In 1822 he published an essay on the Scienza nuova: he questions Vico's presuppositions that ancient chronicles cannot be accepted as trustworthy history, and that history must be discovered through the modifications of the human mind, and he accuses Vico of being inconsistent in that on the one hand he praises Moses as the greatest of the historians, because he was inspired by God and more ancient than the Greek and Roman historians, and as the greatest of the philosophers, but on the other hand he completely disregards the Pentateuch or sets himself against it, when he comes to his reconstruction of ancient times. The complaint is familiar and the conclusions, as one would expect, are much the same as those reached by G. F. Finetti.

---

[33] Labanca, op. cit., pp. 260-64; Croce-Nicolini, Bibliografia vichiana, I, pp. 325-26.

[34] Labanca, op. cit., pp. 275-81; Croce-Nicolini, ibid., pp. 254-58.

As the century progresses the interpretations of Vico become more complex and more sophisticated. For example, a notable trend develops towards emphasizing the positivistic elements in Vico's thought. Terenzio Mamiani (1799-1885) uses Vico's emphasis on the concrete and the role of man in the creation of history as justification for the denial of the need of metaphysics. Carlo Cattaneo (1801-1869) was a serious and capable student of Vico: his interpretation is dominated by his understanding of Vico's *factum* as the raw data of experience by which he reduces the *verum-factum* to an anticipation of the scientific, positivistic theory of knowledge. Carlo Cantoni (1840-1906) wrote the first systematic presentation and critical evaluation of Vico's thought seen in its totality: his viewpoint is that Vico is at his best as a psychologist and historian, rather than as a philosopher, because in his view all metaphysics is useless. According to Pietro Siciliani (1835-1885) in Vico are to be found the elements for the completion, the correction, the union of the positivism of August Comte and John Stuart

Mill.[35]

This particular form of interpretation is significant because it will be criticized by both the Catholic and the idealistic interpreters. For example, Antonio Rosmini (1797-1855), founder of a religious congregation and one of the most original Italian philosophers of the last century, opposed Mamiani's interpretation and reaffirmed the metaphysical elements in Vico's thought, using mostly the De antiquissima and De uno. Rosmini objects to Vico's cyclic theory of history, and apparently he completely misunderstood Vico on the principle of the verum-factum, since he insists that Vico denied that man can know fully only what he has made and he describes the contrary assertion as being against Christian theology. Vincenzo Gioberti (1801-1852) looked upon Vico as the forerunner of his own philosophy and must be given the credit of having made him known in Italy and throughout Europe by way of his writings where he never tires of praising and making references to Vico. It cannot be said that he understood Vico completely or even that he was completely consistent in his attitude towards him: he finds fault with the proposition that civilizations developed independently one from the other and with the fact that Vico excludes the miraculous from history; he rebukes him for introducing scepticism in archeology and idealism in history;

---

[35] See Jacobelli Isoldi, Vico: la vita e le opere, pp. 436-37; Croce-Nicolini, Bibliografia vichiana, II, pp. 609-12 (Mamiani), 646-49 (Cattaneo), 688-89 (Cantoni).

and he finds that he was, quite innocently, the forerunner of unbelief and atheism. It has been observed that whatever affinity may have existed between Vico's philosophy and that of Rosmini and Gioberti it is not only a witness to the profound religious attitude of Vico, but "also a warning on the possibility of developments not totally orthodox in the philosophy of Rosmini and Gioberti."[36]

One of the major figures in Italian literature of the Romantic period, Niccolò Tommaseo (1802-1874), also had deep interest in Vico. Tommaseo was part of a Catholic liberal movement in the nineteenth century, and he became one of the first to reclaim Vico for Catholicism, but he did so not by trying to return Vico's thought to the Counterreformation, but rather by beginning to go beyond the narrow limits of Catholic eighteenth-century thought, and using the new scientific developments to confirm Vico's intuitions and to call Catholic thinkers to a broader, more generous view of the relationship of theology and science.[37] Not that he found no fault in Vico: the most grevious error is, again, the wild, savage state at the beginning of civilization; he also judges as erroneous the denial of the influence of one civilization on another in their beginnings and the denial

---

[36] Jacobelli Isoldi, ibid., p. 436. See Croce-Nicolini, Bibliografia vichiana, II, pp. 612-13 (Rosmini), 613-17 (Gioberti); Nicolini, La religiosità di Giambattista Vico, pp. 188-90.

[37] Antonio Bruers, "Introduzione," to a new edition of Tommaseo, G. B. Vico (Turin: U.T.E.T., 1930), pp. XII-XIII.

XUM

of the unity of all languages.[38]

A few minor figures should be mentioned. Cesare Marini (1792-1862) deserves mention because of his contradictory stances: on the one hand he praises Vico to the skies and compares him to Dante, St. Albert the Great, Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas, and on the other he accuses Vico of a long list of errors, beginning with the same objections already reported for Finetti. Two Catholic critics who made no attempt to reclaim Vico for the orthodox tradition were Cesare Cantù (1804-1895) and Cesare Balbo (1789-1853). Cantù condemns Vico for belittling the role of Christianity in history and for considering the Middle Ages a return to barbarism. Balbo rebukes Vico for proposing a cyclic theory of history instead of the Christian view of a world redeemed, and a history controlled by God alone.[39]

Finally, Baldassare Labanca's book should be mentioned now as one more example of a positivistic interpretation of Vico, over and above its value as a source of information on other authors. Labanca anticipates twentieth century views. As Nicolini would insist without ever tiring during most of this century, Labanca concluded in 1898: the Catholic critics of Vico were learned, intelligent scholars who understood him better than anyone else.

---

[38] *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19; 45, 58-59. See Croce-Nicolini, *Bibliografia vichiana*, II, pp. 599-603; Nicolini, *La religiosità di Giambattista Vico*, pp. 193-95.

[39] Croce-Nicolini, *Bibliografia vichiana*, II, pp. 604-07 (Marini), 639-41 (Cantù), 637-39 (Balbo); Nicolini, *La religiosità di Giambattista Vico*, pp. 187-89, 190-93.

These critics were able to discover a neglected aspect of the Scienza nuova, namely, the theory of the origin and development of religion. These critics have their faults: they judge from a dogmatic viewpoint, i.e., "everything that is new is false," they think that they are the sole and exclusive possessors of the truth, and they did not engage in a comprehensive critique of Vico but only picked on the points that suited them. Labanca's view of Vico is this: he was a scrupulous Catholic who did not intend to deceive anyone, but no publication of the eighteenth century "contained, hidden, so many dangers for the Catholic religion" as the Scienza nuova; and Vico was faithful to traditional beliefs when dealing with Christian doctrines, but a freethinker when it came to other religions. The Roman Catholic critics should have been satisfied that Vico was orthodox when speaking of Christianity, but they could not, because for them one who is not completely with them is against them.[40]

III. The Idealistic Interpretations of Vico's Thought

The reading of Vico in an idealistic sense actually began in the nineteenth century, with Bertrando Spaventa and Francesco De Sanctis. Spaventa (1817-1883) was the first of the Italian followers of Hegel. He was best known for his theory of the circularity of thought: he held, for instance, that one of the two major movements of modern philosophy, idealism, had begun with Vico, moved to Germany in Kant and Hegel, and was returning to Italy with the Italian acceptance of Hegelian philosophy. He tries to close the circle by speaking of "the cunning of providence" in Vico, but for Spaventa this is "humanity itself progressing and producing itself through the particular activities of individuals and people."[41] And he paraphrases Vico: "This mind or Providence is the unity of spirit which gives form and life to this world of nation...this unity of the spirit which is the new God of philosophy."[42] De Sanctis, one of Italy's greatest literary critics, also a disciple of Hegel, promoted aesthetic criticism and the autonomy of art. He interpreted Vico's metaphysics as "the history of the spirit in the world," and Vico's ideal eternal history becomes the history of the unfolding of Mind.[43]

---

[40] Labanca, op. cit., p. 185. Also pp. 423, 427, 437, 185, 304, 336.

The greatest of the idealistic interpreters, the one who more than any other man was responsible for the revival of interest in Giambattista Vico, was Benedetto Croce (1866-1952). Croce read De Sanctis repeatedly as a student at the liceo, before he was twenty years old, and attended Spaventa's lectures on logic at the University of Naples. When he lost his parents and a sister in the 1883 earthquake of Casamicciola he went to Rome and lived with Silvio Spaventa, Bertrando's brother, and there he read the rest of his works. Among his friends at school were Tommaso and Vincenzo De Rosa di Villarosa, whose great-grandfather had collected all of Vico's papers from Vico's son Gennaro: Croce rediscovered these papers in the De Rosa home in 1903.[44] In his theory of aesthetics he vindicated the freedom of poetic expression and the autonomy of the aesthetic experience as the first "moment" of the theoretical activity of the spirit. In philosophy he conceived the whole of reality as historical, in a system of absolute historicism, but he wanted to go beyond Hegel by adding to the dialectic of opposites a dialectic of distinction: the movement of the spirit is articulated in four categories, two belonging to the theoretical activity (aesthetic and logic), two belonging to the practical activity (economics and ethics), but joined in the circularity of the forms of the spirit whereby each category presupposes all the others. History becomes the study of the spirit creating itself, and philosophy becomes the methodology of history as the study of the unfolding of the spirit. Croce saw the seeds and the first expression of his own thought in Vico, in the Scienza nuova. Fausto Nicolini (1879-1965), an intimate friend of Croce, a devoted and enthusiastic follower of his interpretation of Vico, assumed the burden of the editorial, biographical, and historical researches in Vico. Together they formed a team that dominated Vico studies for the first fifty years of this century.

---

[41] Spaventa, La filosofia italiana nelle sue relazioni con la filosofia europea, 3rd ed. (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1926), p. 126; first published in 1862.

[42] Ibid., p. 115. The reference is to S. N. III (1744), #915: "These three special unities, together with many others, that follow upon them and will be included in this book all are brought together in a general unity, which is the unity of the religion of a provident divinity, which is the unity of the spirit that gives form and life to this world of nations." The interpretation of this passage has been a bone of contention between idealist and Catholic scholars: does the relative pronoun following "provident divinity" refer to "divinity" or to "unity"? A.v., is it the provident divinity that is the unity of spirit, or is it the unity of religion? The 1744 edition has a semicolon after "divinity" and the Nicolini text has a comma.

[43] De Sanctis, Opere, Carlo Muscetta, ed., vol. IX, Storia della letteratura Italiana, pp. 828, 827.

---

[44] See M. H. Fisch, "Croce e Vico," Rivista di studi vichiani, V, 1 and 2 (Jan.-March, April-June, 1968), pp. 10-11.

Before proceeding to a more detailed analysis of Croce's interpretation of Vico, mention must be made of Giovanni Gentile (1875-1944), another idealistic interpreter of Vico whose work has been obscured by the greater power and originality of Croce's work. Gentile is the most extreme expression of Italian idealism: outside of thought there is no reality, all realities are resolved in the thinking act of the subject (atto puro), seen as a universal subject, creating itself (autoctisi), without any limits outside of itself, in absolute freedom. Gentile has been accused of having forced Vico into his own mind-set by identifying Vico's verum-factum principle with his own autoctisi, and there are passages where this identification could be argued, but there are also passages where Gentile says that Vico stopped at a philosophy of history instead of moving to a philosophy of spirit, and that Vico never overcame the problem of transcendence and dualism.[45] Be that as it may, Gentile did call attention to the intellectual and metaphysical aspect of Vico's thought, especially by rescuing from neglect the first moment of Vico's philosophical thought, the inaugural lectures, although here again he was carried away by the presence of neo-Platonic elements.

---

[45] Gentile, Studi vichiani, pp. 38, 44, 89, 125-26; see Jacobelli Isoldi, Vico: la vita e le opere, pp. 441-43.

Much has been said already about Croce's view of Vico in the preceding chapter and in this one. Now the different strands can be brought together and Croce's reading of Vico can be presented in its relationship to Croce's own thought. Croce's major contribution to the study of Vico was the book *La filosofia di Giambattista Vico*, first published in 1911. In a later edition, answering his critics who objected that he had not presented Vico's thought objectively but rather had reworked it according to his own ideas, Croce answered that such an "objective" presentation is only external and without soul. "On the other hand, the historical and critical exposition of a philosopher has a different and higher objectivity, and is necessarily the dialogue between the ancient and the new thought, and only in this dialogue the ancient thought can be understood and comprehended."[46] Croce is here applying his idea of the contemporaneity of history to the study of Vico's thought. And he gives a hermeneutical canon for the interpretation of Vico, namely, "to separate by way of analysis what in him is true philosophy from the historical and empirical data with which it is mixed (as well as the latter from the former), and to note all along the effects and the causes of the mingling."[47] But what is true philosophy?

---

[46] Croce, *La filosofia di Giambattista Vico*, p. 9.

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 47.

(1) Absolute historicism, as understood by Croce:

> "Historicism," in the scientific use of the word, is the assertion that life and reality is history and nothing but history. Correlative to this assertion is the denial of the theory that considers reality divided in historical and supra-historical, in a world of ideas and values, and a lower world which reflects them, or has reflected them until now, in a passing and imperfect way, on which these ideas and values will finally have to be imposed so that a rational and perfect reality will succeed imperfect history, or history simply. Since this second way of looking at reality had been known as "abstract rationalism" or "Enlightenment," historicism develops in polemical opposition against the "Enlightenment," and rises above it.[48]

It is this historicist perspective that Croce discovers in the Scienza nuova, and the following paragraph, although not so identified, is a paraphrase of Degnità XIV, already quoted: "To know a fact is equivalent to thinking it in its being, and therefore in its being born and developing in the midst of conditions which in their turn change and unfold, since its being is not to be found anywhere except in its course and unfolding of life..."[49] But historicism in Vico does not have the clear, pure form that Croce might wish, and recognizing this, he states that Vico was prevented from moving without hesitation towards an explicitly historicist view of reality by his Catholic beliefs and his fear of pantheism: the notion of transcendence limited Vico's thought and did not allow him to reach the notion of a unity of all reality and a complete knowledge even of the human world. Through the historicist perspective Croce was able to understand the essential function of history in the thought of Vico and to bring out the importance of the revaluation of history and the immanentistic aspects of Vico's providence. But Croce failed to understand or to accept the fact that Vico's providence cannot be reduced exclusively to the level of immanence, and in so doing he presented a partial reading of Vico.[50]

---

[48] Croce, La storia come pensiero e come azione, p. 51. See M. H. Fisch, "Croce e Vico," p. 29.

[49] Croce, ibid., p. 145; Vico, S. N. III (1744), #147.

(2) A theory of aesthetics. The question of a philosophy of art and beauty was one of Croce's first interests. In an interview some years later, Croce recalled that he was working on a paper on whether history is an art or a science, and he was very dissatisfied with the results, when the solution came to him as a bolt of lightning: history must be art because science deals with the abstract while history, like art, deals with the concrete, the individual; art represents the possible, history the real. The bolt of lightning had come from the Scienza nuova: "Metaphysics abstracts the mind from the senses, the poetic faculty must immerse the whole mind in the senses; metaphysics rises above the universals, the poetic faculty must plunge deeply into the particulars."[51] Croce takes this as the beginning of his theory of aesthetics which makes art or imagination one of the fundamental forms of knowing, the other being logic. Croce states: "That was truly the seed from which the whole life of my spirit has

---

[50] See Jacobelli Isoldi, Vico: la vita e le opere, p.444.

[51] S. N. III (1744), #821; see also #218-19.

developed. From that first problem thus resolved other problems erupted one by one and solutions followed...and thus little by little, with a continuous broadening, my world of the spirit was formed."[52] This viewpoint enabled Croce to discover the beauty and the power of Vico's poetic world, to understand his emphasis on imagination as the possibility and the moment of creativity in the story and in the experience of mankind, one of the most fruitful and most neglected insights of the Scienza nuova. As a result of Croce's work Vico's "discovery of the true Homer" is seen as an integral part of his total view, not just as an interesting digression. But, again, because of his own theory, where aesthetics represents the concrete and the individual, Croce cannot accept the possibility that this emotional creative power can bring forth the "imaginative universal" in Vico, the myth. It is true that a relationship between the particular and the universal, respecting the exigencies of both, has not been worked out in Vico, but to restrict Vico's creative imagination to the aesthetic moment in a formal sense, to poetry for instance, is to take a different direction from the one taken by Vico. "Most acute in intuiting the importance of the concepts of imagination and history in Vico, Croce wants to separate them, violently and cleverly, from their vital matrix, emotional consciousness and social life."[53]

(3) Political and ethical liberalism. Croce was

---

[52] Quoted in M. H. Fisch, "Croce e Vico," p. 14.

[53] Jacobelli Isoldi, Vico: la vita e le opere, p. 445.

XUM

very active in politics until he was stripped of all his responsibilities and positions by the Fascist government. In politics he was a vehement proponent of liberalism: he judged the nineteenth century as the turning point in the history of freedom, because those years saw the decline of Catholicism and the rise of a new religion of liberty. History was beginning to reveal itself as

> wholly the work of freedom, its unique and eternal positive moment, which alone explains and justifies the function of the negative moment of the denial of freedom with its ideals, oppressions, reactions and tyrannies, which (as Vico also would have said) seem "misfortunes" and are "opportunities."[54]

For Croce "the category of humanity and that of liberty coincide," and liberty is "not a contingent fact but an idea," the same as the moral conscience, "a spur constantly to enhance life, to recognize in oneself and in others man, or human power to be respected and promoted in all its creative capabilities."[55] An enemy of liberty is religion in general and the Catholic Church in particular:

> It is religion that becomes transcendent and pulls man out of his liberty and his conscience, and subjects him to a law which does not come from within himself, to a law that comes from above, but not the above which is the sublime and the deep, rather from the above which is the arrogant that hovers menacingly or smiles benignly hiding the threat...[56]

And the Catholic Church offers the best model for all other oppressive regimes who learn from it how to control men with hopes and fears, and how to persecute pitilessly from its priests and how to subjugate men's souls to themselves from the cunning of its greatest artists, the Jesuits.[57]

---

[54] Quoted in Fisch, "Croce e Vico," p. 165.

[55] Croce, La storia come pensiero e come azione, pp. 243, 242.

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 248.

From this attitude Croce reads Vico as a pious and faithful member of the Church who, in spite of himself, developed ideas similar to nineteenth century liberalism. And in later years Croce would raise doubts even about the first part of the preceding statement. Vico continued to maintain the distinction between natural and supernatural by separating the history of Israel and Christianity from the history of the gentile nations, but this was inconsistent with his intuitions, and the logic of his thought leads to a thoroughgoing naturalism and immanentism, in the study of natural law, which arises from the "common sense" of the peoples in the face of the necessary and the useful; in the area of religion which, theoretically, is not revelation but a view of reality, and, practically, is nothing but morality; in the question of morality, which emerges gradually as men emerge from the savage state, and it arises naturally, not as the result of grace: "true divine grace is human nature itself, shared by Gentiles as well as Hebrews, all with a countenance illumined by a divine light."[58]

From this perspective Croce has the great merit of having discovered and proclaimed Vico's vision of man as an inner unfolding, a creative movement carrying within himself

---

[57] *Ibid*., p. 249.

[58] Croce, *La filosofia di Giambattista Vico*, p. 88. See the three chapters on moral conscience, morality and religion, and morality and law.

XUM

at least some of the power of his own becoming, including the areas of law, morality, and religion. But the problem is that Croce also dismissed as undigested residue everything that in Vico did not coincide with this view. And that makes for a truncated Vico.

Jacobelli Isoldi sums up a most intelligent and valid critique of Croce's interpretation of Vico under two points: first, Croce categorizes Vico's thought as a philosophy of the spirit, but this leads to an individualistic conception of man which is in contrast "with Vico's entire speculative experience, because the concept which characterizes man in Vico is that of *societas*"; secondly, Croce forces Vico's philosophy in a schema which opposes the universal to the particular, while in Vico it is a question of two universals, one of imagination and the other of reason, both deficient to a certain extent, both expressing, therefore, the demand for yet another universality that is *verum* and *certum* at the same time.[59]

Croce had many followers and imitators in his idealistic interpretation of Vico, but none could improve, in any significant way, on the insights of the master. One of Croce's followers concludes a series of chapters on Vico by stating that he leads logically to Croce. Once demonstrated, as Croce did, the absurdity of maintaining the distinction between human, historical reality and an extra-human, supra-historical reality, even the so-called objective world of nature is dissolved into a hypothetical, abstract reality. "Then the historicism of Vico will be revealed in all its fullness and power, integral and absolute, and will affirm itself, as in the historicism of Croce, as the only integral form of knowledge."[60]

---

[59] Jacobelli Isoldi, "Il pensiero di Vico nell'interpretazione di B. Croce," *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana*, XXIX, 1 and 2 (Jan.-March, April-June, 1950), pp. 180-81.

IV. The Vindication of Vico for the Roman Catholic Tradition

The appropriation of Vico by the Italian school of idealistic philosophy, frequently identified with a concomitant anti-clerical posture, produced an almost instant reaction by the clerical forces. Just as in the case of the idealistic, historicist interpretation, the Roman Catholic image of a firmly orthodox Vico, in the tradition of Augustine, Thomas and Bossuet, has become such a prominent part of the study of Vico, that the reader meets it almost at every turn. It has made its appearance in this study on several occasions. An attempt will be made now both to present its development and structure as well as to suggest a critical assessment.

The first notice taken of Croce's La filosofia di Giambattista Vico was a lengthy review in the June 1911 issue of the Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica, by Emilio Chiocchetti. It is a rather perceptive presentation of of Croce's views, and only the last paragraph raises a question: "We honestly confess" that before the grandeur of the result achieved by Croce, "we remain somewhat suspicious, and we ask: Is Croce's Vico the true Vico?"[61] Six months later another article appeared in the same journal, by Ernesto Buonaiuti. This one is sharply critical of Croce's book, and the author added a footnote at the end of the article expressing his disappointment with the review by Chiocchetti, because it showed familiarity with the work of Croce but not with Vico. Buonaiuti's article is an extreme example of a partisan viewpoint, but it sounds many of the themes of subsequent critiques. The author complained that once again "the authentic Vico, scholastic, good Catholic, anti-Cartesian, philosopher of history," had been stolen and replaced by the fictitious one in the mind of the interpreter.[62] Croce had approached Vico with his Hegelian preconceptions and so his view of Vico was unilateral and deforming. Buonaiuti's thesis is that "Vico is unintelligible to anyone who does not have a direct knowledge of scholastic epistemology"; Vico's thought is impregnated with scholastic philosophy and it is authentic scholasticism.[63] Vico has an unquestioned faith in supernatural realities and tends to make this faith the basis for natural knowledge. His critique of truth, the verum factum, is simply an original way of setting forth a theory of scientific knowledge, as found in Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy. Buonaiuti builds his argument on another phrase of Vico, scire per causas, and "to know a thing through its causes is equivalent to repeating mentally its process of formation, creating it again, dissecting it and putting it together again instantly in its constitutive elements."[64] History yields the highest truth not because made by men, but because investigated and reconstructed in its causes. And Vico's providence presupposes a transcendent God at every step. Buonaiuti makes two important observations that reappear again in the most recent Vico studies that have gone beyond the rigidly idealistic or Catholic positions: first, he points out the danger of trying to interpret a thinker by subsequent philosophical developments while ignoring the thought that preceded him and the milieu from which he came; secondly, that it is inaccurate and misleading for the understanding of Vico to identify transcendent with supernatural, and to present all immanence as incompatible with Christian thought.[65]

---

[60] Manlio Ciardo, Le quattro epoche dello storicismo: Vico-Kant-Hegel-Croce (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1947), p. 89.

---

[61] Chiocchetti, "Giambattista Vico nella mente di Benedetto Croce," Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica, III, 3-4 (June, 1911), p. 394.

[62] Buonaiuti, "G. B. Vico interpretato da un idealista," Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica, III, 6 (Dec., 1911), p.670.

[63] *Ibid.*, pp. 673-74.

Alberto Scrocca took issue with Croce's book in a series of articles in 1917 and 1918, revised and published in book form in 1919. Two things should be noted in this work: (i) the author gives great weight to Vico's professions of faith and orthodoxy, and searches Vico's literary output besides the Scienza nuova in order to find support for the thesis of the orthodoxy of Vico's thought; (ii) the author begins to recognize the central role given to man by Vico in the process of history: Vico's providence is substantially the same as Bossuet's, but in Vico there is a clearer vision of man's freedom.[66]

---

[64] Ibid., p. 677.

[65] Ibid., pp. 676, 678.

Mention has already been made of a commemorative issue of the Catholic University of Milan publications on the occasion of the two hundredth anniversary of the publication of Scienza nuova prima (1725). It is mentioned here again because it contains an article by Emilio Chiocchetti on the fundamental epistemological and metaphysical ideas in G. B. Vico. Chiocchetti became one of the two principal Catholic writers in the continuing polemic with Croce and Nicolini. In this article he expresses reservations about the coherence of Vico's thought and especially about Vico's denial of a philosophical knowledge of God, "the theological agnosticism that deeply defiles Vico's philosophy. God, his existence, his attributes are relegated to the realm of probability, never capable of attaining the dignity of demonstrated truth."[67] But, mainly, the article is Chiocchetti's first formulation of his thesis that Vico's philosophy is

---

[66] Scrocca, Giambattista Vico nella critica di Benedetto Croce (Naples: Dr. Gennaro Giannini Ed., 1919), pp. 6, 21-22, 74, 125.

[67] Chiocchetti, "Fondamentali idee gnoseologiche e metafisiche in G. B. Vico," in Agostino Gemelli, ed., op. cit, p. 83.

Augustinian Platonism: Vico's mind set inclined him towards Platonic metaphysics, with God as the logical and ontological principle of all things, man's ideas as copies of the eternal ideas in God, and history as the actualization of these ideas. And so Vico's "ideal eternal history" becomes the eternal idea of history present in the mind of God and revealing itself in history.[68]

This is the thesis that Chiocchetti developed in a series of articles, later collected in the book La filosofia di G. B. Vico (1935). The introduction begins to locate Vico in relationship to the authors that preceded him and by whom he was or may have been influenced, in order to show that Vico's philosophy is not a pantheistic neo-Platonism, as Gentile had claimed, but Christian Platonism. He contends that, while Vico rejects scholasticism, he accepts all the dualisms which form part of "perennial philosophy": God and world, subject and object, body and soul, being and thought. The principle of the verum factum could be construed in an idealistic sense, if taken by itself, but not if integrated with the other criteria of truth found in Vico: experimental knowledge from induction and historical knowledge from the consensus of the human race. There is not a succession of stages of thought, in Vico, but only different principles searching for harmony and a coherence that is not always achieved. Chiocchetti recognizes that Vico's providence is neither that of Augustine and Bossuet nor that of Spinoza;

---

[68] Ibid., pp. 91, 87.

more like that of Leibniz and Rosmini: "...the spirit of God synthesizes with the human spirit in producing individual history and that of the nations. Man acts freely, God accompanies him and uses man's particular ends to arrive at universal goals."[69] Chiocchetti's merit was to bring out every detail of Platonic influence in Vico's work; his main weakness was to dismiss any element with a possibility of an idealistic or empiricist interpretation as unresolved incoherence, stemming from Vico's inability to master and unify his vision: this is simply a repeat of Croce's methodology with the terms reversed.

The other major Roman Catholic figure in the polemic with the idealistic interpretations was Franco Amerio. Along with some articles and a school anthology of Vico's writings, Amerio published in 1947 an introduction to the study of Vico which is the major document of the orthodox interpretation of Vico. In some ways it is an entirely different book from Croce's more influential work on the philosophy of Vico: it is much larger and more detailed, more minute in its examination of texts, more scholarly in its critical apparatus, more systematic in its presentation of Vico's thought, more pedantic, and with an implacable polemic against Croce running from beginning to end of its more than five hundred pages. But in other ways it reflects the same kind of attitude, the same determination to make Vico fit into a predefined system of thought, the same assurance that the author's viewpoint gives the only true understanding of Vico. In the introduction Amerio states his polemic intent as well as the hope that his work will succeed in leaving no doubts on the arbitrariness of the idealistic image of Vico, which he was about to demonstrate, and on the place of Vico's philosophy in the stream of Christian thought.[70] In a later article, in response to criticisms of the book, Amerio made his position clearer:

---

[69] Chiocchetti, La filosofia di G. B. Vico, p. 63; see pp. 12, 29, 30.

> Our thesis is the fundamental orthodoxy of Vico's thought, since we have found in him not only the acceptance of the supernatural, but also the philosophical theses which condition the Christian vision of the world, and which can be summed up in *theological transcendence*, *metaphysical spiritualism*, and *epistemological realism*.[71]

And he doesn't understand how he could be criticized for pretending that his interpretation is the only legitimate one. The human mind is able to attain truth, and truth is by its nature exclusive; the thesis of orthodoxy and heterodoxy are substantially opposite and mutually exclusive: how can they possibly co-exist?[72]

The negative reaction of the idealistic school was to be expected, but not its bitterness and rudeness. The following quotation from the *Bibliografia vichiana* is given as an example of the kind of prose produced more by temper than by reason:

---

[70] Amerio, *Introduzione allo studio di G. B. Vico*, p. VIII.

[71] Amerio, "Sull'interpretazione di Vico," *Giornale di metafisica*, VI, 1 (Jan.-Feb., 1951), p. 72.

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

> Being accustomed to respect even books that are poorly done and mistaken, when they are the result of great labor, I would not want to denigrate this book which certainly cost its author much work. But, alas! perhaps never before has so much work been wasted from the scientific aspect! And wastedbecause done with a method that is as scholastic as are priests and as nit-picking as are lawyers; which means that the author closed both eyes when he should have kept them wide open, and he opened them incredibly wide in order to see enlarged to the size of poles what were only splinters of no consequence.[73]

At the opposite end of the spectrum Amerio's book marked a date to be remembered, a turning point in the history of Vico studies, since it had vindicated his essential Catholic orthodoxy.[74]

Less partisan critics recognized the importance of the work. Antonio Corsano, one of the most respected scholars in the field, admits that it is the type of work that no serious student of Vico will be able to ignore in the future, but regrets its intransigence in rejecting not only the idealistic view of Vico but also any other view that does not conform to the most rigid Catholic orthodoxy.[75]

Both the massive size, the overwhelming amassing of material, as well as the structure of Amerio's Introduzione render any attempt towards a comprehensive presentation doomed from the start: the only feasible approach is to select a few key points. The structure itself is significant and should be mentioned, followed by a brief look at the three philosophical theses which, according to Amerio, condition the Christian vision and which he found in Vico.

---

[73] Croce-Nicolini, Bibliografia vichiana, II, p. 975.

[74] Giacomo Soleri, "Rivendicazione di Vico," Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica, XLII, 1 (Jan.-Feb., 1950), p. 82.

[75] Corsano, "Interpretazioni cattoliche del Vico," Rivista di filosofia, XL, 3 (July-Sept., 1949), p. 289.

(1) Amerio follows a strictly logical order in his study, and Vico's thought is re-arranged in a rigidly systematic way. The opening chapter is on the question of epistemology and the possibility of metaphysics, followed by the chapter on man and one on God. Religion, morality and theory of law are treated next, to conclude with three chapters on the Scienza nuova seen primarily as a philosophy of history. In each chapter Vico's ideas are presented, carefully and abundantly documented from any and all works that have anything to offer on the topic; then Vico's thought is interpreted and explained, and finally Croce's views on the particular subject are presented, discussed, and refuted. The style is similar to that of a textbook of scholastic philosophy, and it lends itself to admirable clarity and order, but it does violence to Vico's thought by forcing it into a system that is alien to it. If there is any unity in Vico, it is the continuing search for a form of knowledge that is valid, ideal and concrete at the same time; this search takes Vico through metaphysics, and the issue of the origin and foundation of law to emerge and settle in the lights and shadows of history.

(2) The key epistemological principle, though not the only one, is the reciprocity of verum and factum. This principle is explained by Amerio as a purely mental "making,"

XUM

so that the verum is reduced to a mental reproduction of the object of knowledge. The truth of the object reveals itself to the mind as the mind makes it again: "this self-revelation, mediated through the "making," is the criterion to be substituted for the too simplistic clarity of the idea; through it, in a critically valid manner, my mind produces and discovers its conformity to the objective order of being."[76] Amerio remarks that, although the principle assumes the posture of being new, it remains within the boundaries of the traditional philosophical vision, because it is rooted in the dualism of the distinction between logical and ontological order, human and divine mind, subject and object. Amerio admits a new emphasis in Vico, the insistence of the active character of the knowing subject. This seems too little to concede to the notion of "making" in Vico, who attempted to go beyond the dualisms just listed through many years of difficult work: he may have failed, but he did not establish his philosophical efforts on the acceptance of these dualisms. "Amerio lacks understanding of Vico's efforts to reconcile the concreteness of history with the eternity of the idea, divine authority with human authority, rational and sense knowledge."[77]

(3) The issue of metaphysical spiritualism has to do with maintaining the distinction between spiritual and material, mind and body. Vico holds metaphysics in high

---

[76] Amerio, Introduzione, p. 34.

[77] Jacobelli Isoldi, Vico: la vita e le opere, p. 450.

esteem: it is capable not only of attaining probability, as Croce reads him, but truth, a truth either received from God or seen in God, or at least discovered through the recovery of the elements that go into the making of things in their real first principle, namely in God. The human mind can attain to some knowledge of God: Vico only rejected _a priori_ demonstrations for the existence of God, but accepted _a posteriori_ proofs, just as Thomas Aquinas did, although Amerio admits that Vico's criterion of truth is not applicable to God. Even so, man's knowledge of God cannot be described as unscientific or lacking in certainty, because God is the first model of the _verum factum_ principle, and the elements of all critically valid knowledge must be found in him, the first principle: "Knowledge of God is implied in every valid knowledge, because God is the first truth without whom nothing is true, and the first cause without whom there is no other cause."[78] This is explained by using Vico's notion of the _vis veri_ interpreted as _notiones seminales_, seeds of truth, left in man after the fall, therefore derived not from object or from the mind itself, but given by God. And if this sounds like a theory of innate ideas, it really must be understood more as a denial of the sufficiency of material objects to create ideas: in Vico this theory is nothing more than a general assertion that senses and body can be the occasion, but not the cause, of an idea. "For, in the end it is this, and only this, that concerns Vico: the irreducibility of the intellect to the senses..."[79] These elements can certainly be found in Vico, but not elevated to the status of a finished and logical system as described by Amerio. The *vis veri* is more of a dynamic power at work within man to help him confront the changing situations and to move him forward on the road to civilization. And if there is a heavier side on the balance between intellect and sense, reason and imagination, Vico is clearly on the side of the second terms.

---

[78] Amerio, _Introduzione_, p. 92.

(4) The question of theological transcendence and the acceptance of the supernatural has been discussed at length and repeatedly, and there is no need to add anything here.

The merits and the limitations of Amerio's work can be stated in a broad way and they will be applicable to the whole movement of Catholic interpretation. The real achievements were to have forced Vico studies to take into account seriously Vico's whole output and not just the *Scienza nuova*; to have shown that the transcendent, the reality beyond history, cannot be easily dismissed or simply reduced to an immanent "rationality of history," or "unity of spirit"; in this respect these authors also pointed out the narrow and distorted image of a transcendent God as devised by the idealistic schools to be rejected; they were able to call attention to the onesided image of Vico that emerged from the idealistic school, and to the dilemma of a Vico either unaware of his own thought or dishonest, when it came to the question of orthodoxy; they awakened other scholars to the danger of interpreting Vico almost exclusively in function of the thought that followed him while neglecting the influence on him of the thought that preceded him. The main limitation is built into their methodology. By making the study of Vico a running polemic with the immanent and idealistic interpretation, they were inevitably led to look for another Vico, equally narrow and incomplete, the orthodox Vico in harmony with the philosophy of the Roman Catholic theological tradition. If this is the true Vico, he is not worth reading, because it has all been said many times and better before.

---

[79] *Ibid*., p. 154. Amerio was still defending his thesis and his view of Vico as late as 1968, in the essay "Sulla vichiana dialettica della storia," in *Omaggio a Vico* (Naples: Morano, 1968), discussed in Corsano, "Vent'anni di studi italiani sul Vico," *Cultura e scuola*, IX, 35 (July-Sept., 1970), p. 105-06.

V. New Trends in the Interpretation of Vico's Thought

There were other authors who took up arms in the defense of a Catholic, orthodox Vico, but to study them is like listening to an endless "theme with variations," often done with considerable lack of imagination. Moreover, in a survey of Vico literature, a very acute observer sees Amerio's book as marking the end of an era, and the year 1947 as the most appropriate date to mark the passage from one era to another in the study of Vico, from a preoccupation with a methodological approach and a comprehensive perspective to

XUM

more historical and particularized studies, more limited in scope but also more manageable. Of Amerio's book Piovani says:

> ...an honest book, of vast proportions, in more than one place convincing in taking apart numerous interpretations daringly proposed by the idealists during their more productive and less critical years; however, a book born old, ideologically to be backdated in many of its views and attacks, a testimony to the continuing methodological backward state of historico-philosophical studies in the Italian Catholic culture, even with all its exact information, even with its too far-spread polemical documentation...Amerio's Introduzione to Vico, rather than opening a conversation, closed, with the most respectable honesty, a bitter dialogue begun by the previous generation...[80]

The same author had already remarked that the great merit of Fausto Nicolini had been to give rise and to stimulate a thoroughly scientific study of the life, the texts, the sources of Vico, but as the data on Vico became more accurate and more profound, he emerged in a different light than the one suggested by the neo-idealistic philosophy.[81]

Antonio Corsano, an outstanding participant and observer of the whole Vico event of the twentieth century, chooses 1948 as the dividing line between two phases in the history of research for this period,

> ...because it concludes the period that could be called that of systematic literature, characterized by the great interpretative monographs of different and conflicting stance (Croce, Gentile, Nicolini, Amerio) and it begins the period of analytic research, which has tirelessly tormented those interpretations and so has begun a critical revision of those positions, a revision whose final result is not yet in sight.[82]

---

[80] Pietro Piovani, "Per gli studi vichiani," in Campanella e Vico (Padova: CEDAM, 1969), p. 75.

[81] Ibid., p. 72-73.

[82] Corsano, "Vent'anni di studi italiani nul Vico," Cultura e scuola, p. 84.

Both Piovani and Corsano give a prominent place in this changing of direction to Nicola Abbagnano, whose ideas are contained in a chapter on Vico in a book on the history of philosophy, and in a brief introduction to a selection of Vico's works. In it he argues vigorously against one of Croce's main conclusions, namely that Vico was a century ahead of his time, that he is the nineteenth century in embryo and the precursor of Hegel. Abbagnano defines this approach as easy and brilliant but also anti-historical, even when inspired by absolute historicism. He calls for a new reading of Vico, "More patient, I would almost want to say more humble, a reading that will not reject from the beginning as prejudice or errors the attitudes that were dearest to Vico."[83] The first and the most fundamental of these attitudes is the religious one. Abbagnano does not raise the question of orthodoxy but rather the question of the very direction of Vico's thought: viewing man from the perspective of the fall of Adam, Vico is constantly faced with the question of the limitations of human reason and action. Abbagnano traces the _verum factum_ principle to Hobbes, with the difference that Vico applies it to the world of ethics and politics, and gives it the dynamic character of historical development, instead of the static, _a priori_ determination of principles found in Hobbes. The principle is, in reality,

---

[83] Abbagnano, "Introduzione," in _La scienza nuova e opere scelte_, p. 13.

XUM

"a limiting principle, restricting the claims of human knowledge to the limited sphere of the world created by man, while giving it full and autonomous validity in that sphere."[84] Vico was searching for a way to understand man, his world, his communities, his history, and he saw him both fallen and weak but also the maker of his own history, where he is free but also responsible not only for the course of events but also for the transcendent future meaning of history. In this Abbagnano saw Vico as another integral expression of eighteenth century Enlightenment. And he concluded with a call for a truly historical understanding of Vico, in relationship to his own time and its needs.[85]

It is the historical understanding of Vico which has produced the best works of the past twenty-five years. To mention only a few, Badaloni's introduction to Vico is like a guide through the intricacies of the journey followed by Vico, of the various currents of thought that surrounded him, and of those that lead to him. His work is the most representative of the new direction, not only for the depth and breadth of his investigations, but especially for the attitude which exemplifies it: he supplies not general interpretations but exact details; not hermeneutical theses, but data examined and to be examined.[86] Biagio De Giovanni and Giuseppe Giarrizzo, in their perceptive and timely studies on the juridical and political domination during Vico's life, have revised the notion of a Vico completely divorced from his political climate: while he was not actively involved in movements and changes, his thought assumes a new dimension when seen in the framework of the political situation, as a reaction to the effort of the men in the legal profession to assume a ruling position.[87] Augusto Del Noce is a Catholic writer, and he does study Vico on the premise of the alternative of modern thought between atheism and Christian thought, but he sees him very precisely in his relationship to Descartes and Malebranche.[88] Angela Maria Jacobelli Isoldi has produced the latest comprehensive study of Vico, a substantial and solid work, showing excellent historical preparation and critical ability.[89]

---

[84] Ibid., p. 15.

[85] Ibid., p. 23. Nicolini reacted angrily to Abbagnano's suggestions, stating that if they were correct he, Nicolini, had been a perfect imbecile, since he had always presented Vico as diametrically opposed to the Enlightenment. Abbagnano replied in "Vico e l'illuminismo: risposta a Fausto Nicolini," Rivista di filosofia, XLIV, 3 (July, 1953), pp. 338-42.

Mention must be made, because of its historical interest, of the possibility of a Marxist interpretation of Vico. In 1948 the translation of an article by a Russian author, M. Lifshitz, was published. The author shows that Marx was acquainted with the Scienza nuova and recommended its reading, and then proceeds to present this work as the forerunner of Marxist-communist thought. The article reflects Russian-communist ideology, rather than Marxism: the following quotations need no comment.

---

[86] Nicola Badaloni, Introduzione a G. B. Vico (Milan: Feltrinelli editore, 1961). See Pietro Piovani, "Per gli studi vichiani," p. 80.

[87] See Corsano, "Vent'anni di studi italiani sul Vico," pp. 93-99.

[88] Ibid., pp. 87-89.

[89] Jacobelli Isoldi, Vico: la vita e le opere. See Corsano, ibid., pp. 89-92.

> One especially striking aspect of the New Science is the deep understanding of the agrarian basis of world history, the splendid analysis of the class struggle among ancient peoples, the theory of the state as a means of defending the prevailing form of property.
>
> . . .
>
> These pages are a brilliant portrait of the pettiness and egoism of human manners in a society based on private property.
>
> . . .
>
> In Vico's philosophy can be heard the unconscious echo of excruciating historical labor, the voice of depressed peoples, whose miseries were the direct result of the general progress of mankind.[90]

Much more serious were the contributions of Nicola Badaloni. In a very clever article, in 1949, he proposed the thesis that the idealistic and Catholic schools of interpretation were moving closer and closer together and were being united by their common aversion to any form of materialistic view of reality. Champions of idealism and spiritualism joined efforts in protecting Vico from any materialistic interpretation, but this "spiritual seesaw...reveals the reactionary positions of today's bourgeois culture" and hides the true Vico because it ignores the political and economic elements that lead him to his theorizing.[91] But in his Introduzione, already mentioned, and in other articles Badaloni's Marxist perspective appears only in some added emphasis on the political, naturalistic and economic themes in Vico's works.[92]

---

[90] Lifshitz, "Giambattista Vico (1668-1744)," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, VIII, 3 (March, 1948), pp. 402, 410, 414.

[91] Badaloni, "L'idealismo, il cattolicesimo e G. B. Vico," Società, V, 2 (June, 1949), p. 283.

In a more theoretical article Jacobelli Isoldi compares the idealist-materialist dialectic in Vico and Marx, in the concepts of verum-factum and theory-praxis. And in her major work she recognizes that the function of the popular masses and the class struggle in Vico's thought does present some affinities to Marxist theory, but the presence of the divine in the human for Vico prevents the comparison from going any further.[93]

Piovani asks: must the studies of Vico that will soon be available, and those that one might wish to be undertaken, be limited to the philological, erudite, historical field? No study of Vico should or could completely separate philosophy from philology, but instead of seeing Vico within a total philosophical vision it would be more fruitful to find specific questions within the complex thought of Vico, and to develop them along the lines suggested by the question itself; and instead of concentrating on the influence of Vico on subsequent thought, it is more important at this time to see it in itself, "in its significance as a new and original moment in the dialectic of knowing and as a typical

---

[92] See, e.g., "Storia e metafisica nel pensiero di G. B. Vico," Società, VII, 2 (June, 1951), pp. 228, 230-32, 234, 237, 239.

[93] Jacobelli Isoldi, Vico: la vita e le opere, p. 464. See also "Vico e Marx," Giornale critico della filosofia italiana, XXX, 1 and 2 (Jan.-March, April-June, 1951).

XUM

manifestation of a cognitive attitude that will assert itself in various and valid ways in our own time."[94] And he warns against more attempts towards the "instrumentalization" of Vico's thought, to use Vico as the proponent and the vehicle of ideas that do not belong to him, or only partially belong to him.

Summary and Conclusions

The history of the interpretations of Vico's thought in the more than two hundred years since his death is a fascinating chapter in a total study of this author, and the complete story deserves and demands a separate work just for this purpose. It is as complex and difficult to follow as the history of Vico's own thought, and in a way it seems to parallel his life, showing both narrow attacks and damning praise (similar to the friend of Vico who thought that one of his funeral orations was greater than the Scienza nuova), long periods of neglect and instances of profound misunderstanding, and the appropriation of Vico for partisan and sectarian purposes. In this study the main question of interest is Vico's religiosity and the implications of his thought for Christian theology.

On the issue of Vico's personal religious attitudes the available evidence would seem to demand that Vico be

---

[94] Piovani, "Per gli studi vichiani," p. 93, quoting also Antonino Pagliaro, "Lingua e poesia secondo G. B. Vico," in Altri saggi di critica semantica (Messina-Firenze, 1961), p. 299.

XUM

taken at his word. He gave repeated profession of orthodox faith in his writings, he gave evidence of sincere piety in his life and in his thought, and he maintained friendly relations and some deep and lasting friendships with many members of the ecclesiastical structure, with no indications that he was ever suspect to them. There is no way at this time to know whether or not Vico experienced in his own conscience a conflict between his "discoveries" and his faith, and, if he did, whether he reconciled the conflict within himself or lived with it. Was he aware of the contrast between some of his ideas and the theology of the time? Were there two Vicos, one the believer, the other the philosopher, at odds with one another, one or the other gaining the upper hand at different times? Did Vico try to mislead the ecclesiastical authorities by his adulation and statements of true faith, so that they would not become suspicious of his writings? Since the data so far presented do not supply a final answer, it would seem best to accept the explicit statements and evident stance of faith and piety as genuine and sincere.

The implications of Vico's theories for Christian and especially for Roman Catholic theology have been examined during this whole period, beginning from the last years of Vico's life. Throughout the eighteenth and most of the nineteenth century some of the conclusions of the Scienza nuova were attacked for their incompatibility with the data of the Scripture, taken, of course, very literally. The

XUM

main items in these controversies were Vico's theories on the origin of the pagan nations, on the origin of language, and on the interpretation of myth. The Scriptural orthodoxy of Vico's ideas is no longer relevant, after the results of biblical criticism, except for the question of the distinction between sacred and profane history, in Vico's terms, between Israel as the privileged people of God and the Gentile nations, already raised by Bonifacio Finetti.

With the arrival of the positivistic and idealistic perspectives, responsible for the great revival of interest and study in Vico, the problem of his orthodoxy began to shift towards his more substantive and essential thought: does Vico's view of historical reality encompass the totality of being (or becoming), or does it leave room for a supra-historical reality? does the role of divine providence imply an ontologically distinct divinity or does it describe an inner force, totally immanent to the historical process? does the theory of the origin of civilization in the _Scienza nuova_ logically demand a purely materialistic view of man, or is there room for a spiritual, immortal part (or supernatural presence) in the life of man? Is religion a purely natural phenomenon, associated with the more primitive stages of civilization, expressed in myths, destined to disappear in the age of full reason, or is it a vital and necessary force at every level of development? The debate over these questions dominated the first fifty years of this century, with Benedetto Croce and Fausto Nicolini becoming

XUM

the persistent voices proclaiming Vico the herald of absolute historicism in an idealistic sense, and Emilio Chiocchetti and Franco Amerio the names most often mentioned for the vindication of Vico to Roman Catholic orthodoxy.

What can be said about this debate? The following observations seem pertinent here:

(i) Both sides must be given a great deal of credit and gratitude for their profound contributions to the understanding of Vico. They focused an often brilliant spotlight on specific aspects of Vico's thought, and while the very brilliance of the vision in one direction may have left other areas in darkness, what they illumined can never again be ignored in the study of Vico. In particular, Croce's book of 1911 on the philosophy of Vico was the catalytic agent for the new age of interest and appreciation of Vico.

(ii) Both sides presented a narrow, limited, onesided view of Vico. In both cases Vico's thought is seen from a given, systematic philosophical position, and Vico is seen in function of that system. Both are partisan, sectarian views, and for this reason they have been surpassed and critically abandoned as a total interpretation, and have engendered great caution about all comprehensive systematizing of Vico's thought.

(iii) These two schools of interpretation must be seen in their historical and theological setting. On the one hand Benedetto Croce was one of the best known and most aggressive exponents of the Italian liberalism which came into power with the establishment of the Kingdom of Italy and manifested

XUM

its anti-clerical bias in such ways as the expropriation of Church property and opposition to religious schools, although it must be noted that Croce, as minister of public instruction, had favored religious education in public grammar schools. On the other hand, when Croce's La filosofia di Giambattista Vico appeared in 1911, the theological climate was saturated by the reaction to and the fear of Modernism, condemned in 1907, but still on everyone's mind: the oath against Modernism was issued in 1910, and a series of decisions by the Pontifical Biblical Commission between 1907 and 1914, declared to be binding in conscience, abruptly checked the first hesitant steps of Catholic biblical criticism. Modernism proposed a theory of the historical evolution of doctrine and dogma, and the reaction became a rigid espousal of the immutability of dogma. A brilliant young historian, in the judgment of Croce and Nicolini, described the situation accurately and powerfully in a 1923 inaugural lecture at the University of Naples. The passages are too long to be given in their entirety, but a few sentences will give the heart of his judgment:

> The division of modern thought from ecclesiastical thinking happened, in substance, because of the inability of the Church to welcome and preserve within itself the whole life of the faithful. Dogmatic rigidity, arrived at after the struggle of a thousand years, paralized any capability for expansion and development.
>
> . . .
>
> Given this fundamental metaphysical antithesis between Catholicism and the historical mind, we are

XUM

> able to understand why a Christian history cannot arise from the Catholic mentality.[95]

Amerio reflects this theological perspective. His argument against Finetti's Apologia is that there had been no dogmatic definition of the historical data found in Scripture and therefore Vico could not be called a heretic, especially since heresy requires "obstinacy in the condemned error." About Nicolini's reasoning he states: "...he remains firm in the same elementary mistake of confusing the human word with the divine, of which the only mediator to man is the Church, not theologians or exegetes, even if they are in unanimous agreement."[96] Nicolini speaks from the same understanding of theology and dogma. He almost seems upset that biblical criticism was beginning to modify in some ways the acceptance of Genesis, and one gets the feeling that he is accusing the Church of being unfair in beginning to change in its understanding of dogmas, thus becoming a moving and more difficult target!

> I don't know--and for the purposes of the present research it is not important to know--what the Catholic

---

[95] Adolfo Omodeo, "Il valore umano della storia cristiana," Giornale critico della filosofia italiana, IV (1923), pp. 333, 335. The lecture was given as an introduction to a course on the history of the Church, the chair that Omodeo had just received at the age of 24. Nicolini notes that Omodeo was heckled during the lecture by "little people from sacresties," who objected to a "heretic" being given such a position. Bibliografia vichiana, II, p. 847.

[96] Amerio, "Critici cattolici e critici non-cattolici di G. B. Vico," Giornale di metafisica, VII, 6 (Nov.-Dec., 1952), pp. 721, 726.

> Church, in its role of supreme regulator of dogmas and their interpretation, is today prescribing to be believed on this particular question...it is not a rare case that reasons of opportunity may lead her today, even in matters of faith, to profess propositions that she herself, in previous centuries, had condemned as heretical.[97]

The conclusion to be drawn is this: from the perspective of literal biblical interpretation and a rigidly dogmatic theological stance Vico's thought suggests several heterodox implications and conclusions, especially in the historicist view of human reality. But in the light of biblical criticism and some contemporary theological developments Vico would be very much at home with some modern theology and his thought very relevant and still capable of valid suggestions. This relevance and validity is what the rest of this study wants to show, not Vico's orthodoxy. And it is hoped this will be done in the spirit of the new directions in Vico studies, as suggested by Pietro Piovani: to examine significant elements of Vico's thought in themselves and in the questions raised by them, and to see them as important moments in the historical development of knowledge.

---

[97] Nicolini, La religiosità di Giambattista Vico, pp. 199, 200.

Chapter IV

Vico and Contemporary Theology: The Question of History

Introduction

The issue of the orthodoxy of an author's work is no longer the primary issue in theological circles, although it is still being raised, especially by some official bodies charged with the task of preserving unity and purity of doctrine at least in the Roman Catholic Church. When the question is raised among theologians it seems to be more in terms of fidelity to the biblical witness, continuity with a particular Christian tradition, and congruity with modern modes of thought. Speaking about disagreements between Protestant and Roman Catholic Theologians, George A. Lindbeck made the point that the framework of the disagreements is changing, due to the fact that theologians "increasingly experience and interpret both natural and supernatural realities in categories very different from those of the past." As a result some of the classic differences are no longer present and, when new ones appear, they "do not always follow the old boundaries between the confessions."[1]

---

[1] Lindbeck, "The Framework of Catholic-Protestant Disagreement," The Word in History: The St. Xavier Symposium, T. Patrick Burke, ed. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966), p. 102.

XUM

The present climate of opinion also modifies the approach towards the religious implications of Vico's thought. Among the large number of lectures and publications on Vico for the occasion of the third centennary of his birth, there are discussions on the primacy of religion in Vico's thought, on the relationship of his personal religious life to his thought, and on other similar topics, but hardly any mention of the question of his orthodoxy from the perspective of Roman Catholic doctrine. And there is an awareness of a sympathetic resonance between some of Vico's ideas and recent thought on religion. Having compared the metaphysical thought of Tommaso Campanella and Giambattista Vico, one author concludes:

> Their metaphysic could in fact be interpreted both in the key of immanence as well as in the key of transcendence, giving rise to interminable discussions, precisely because their metaphysical thought reflects the dramatic tension of a conscience which feels committed at the same time to the world, to history and to God. Their metaphysic, therefore, cannot possess the balanced systematic character of a science, as it does in Descartes, but does offer us the testimony of an existential experience which reveals itself ever more consonant with that of today.[2]

Instead of orthodoxy, then, the issue can be stated as that of the relationship and compatibility of Vico's philosophical vision with some of the trends in theological thought today.

Very little work has been done in this area, at least in what is available up to the present. In the recent past, Rudolf Bultmann devoted some pages to a discussion of Vico in History and Eschatology, the published 1955 Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh. However, Bultmann misunderstands Vico when he interprets Vico as having reduced history to natural history, while Vico's new science, in order to affirm the quality of science for history, wants to be emancipated from nature.[3] Strangely, Bultmann accepts the views of historicity of Collingwood and Croce, adding to their theories only his own emphasis on the "I" in personal decision, but fails even to mention that Croce had seen Vico as the forerunner of most of his ideas, and especially of his absolute historicism.[4] But at least he recognizes that in the Scienza nuova "the theological teleology of history is transformed in a decisive manner."[5] Wolfhart Pannenberg, for whom history is such a central concern, makes only a passing reference to Vico in one of his early essays, where he lumps him with Voltaire and the Enlightenment in the process of the deterioration of the Christian understanding of history by which "man has been

---

[2] Jacobelli Isoldi, "Il problema della metafisica in Campanella e Vico," Campanella e Vico (Padova: CEDAM, 1969), p. 67.

---

[3] Bultmann, History and Eschatology: The Presence of Eternity (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957), p. 80. See some passing reactions to Bultmann's interpretation by Pietro Piovani, "Vico e la filosofia senza natura," Campanella e Vico (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1969), p. 267; and Antonio Corsano, "Discussione," ibid., p. 334.

[4] Bultmann, op. cit., pp. 142-47.

[5] Ibid., p. 64.

XUM

exalted to the place of God as the one who bears history."[6] An author who has written extensively on Vico in a recent book devotes a few pages to contemporary theology, with specific reference to its secular directions, to the "Death-of-God" theology and to Bonhoeffer. He dismisses these currents of thought as leading to a Christianity without God and without religion, and a destruction of the mission of Christ, and suggests that Vico is the perfect humanist, because he remains a Christian and does not attempt to turn everything upside down for the sake of making Christianity palatable to modern man.[7] On the other hand, W. Taylor Stevenson, dealing with the challenge and the opportunities open to contemporary theology as a result of the growth of historical consciousness in modern thought, gives a prominent place to Vico in the movement that leads to the "self-conscious awareness of man as a peculiarly historical being who is continually creating himself in the historical process."[8]

In the paper already quoted George A. Lindbeck accepts the suggestion that

---

[6] Pannenberg, "Redemptive Event and History," Essays in Old Testament Hermeneutics, Claus Westermann, ed. (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1963), p. 330.

[7] Luigi Bellofiore, Morale e storia in G. B. Vico (Padova: CEDAM, 1972), pp. 188-93.

[8] Stevenson, History as Myth: The Import for Contemporary Theology (New York: The Seabury Press, 1969), p. 33. Stevenson's use of Vico will be examined again later.

XUM

> ...at least as far as theology is concerned, the greatest difference between our outlook and that of the 16th century is that we are vastly more aware, both experientially and reflectively, of the historical dimensions of reality, both human and non-human.[9]

This new awareness has created the new framework for theological reflection and dialogue. Lindbeck's assessment is shared by so many authors that it has almost become a commonplace. Karl Löwith states that in the nineteenth century "history had become our most urgent, universal and biggest problem."[10] The problem, as he sees it, is that history, or rather historicism, has become the dogmatic presupposition of contemporary thought, as "the belief in the absolute relevance of what is most relative: history."[11] Nor has the problem, as seen by Löwith, disappeared in the twentieth century: "If any cultural consensus is possible in our time, its chief and perhaps only components would be the importance of scientific methodology and the necessity of historical thinking. This is our vision of the world."[12] And many present day thinkers would agree that historical thinking is not only a problem, but also, and perhaps even

---

[9] Lindbeck, _op. cit_., p. 106.

[10] Löwith, _Permanence and Change: Lectures on the Philosophy of History_ (Cape Town, South Africa: Haum, 1969), p. 69.

[11] Löwith, _Nature, History, and Existentialism: And Other Essays in the Philosophy of History_, ed. with a critical introduction by Arnold Levison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966), p. 143.

[12] Stevenson, _op. cit_., p. 9.

XUM

more, an opportunity to build on this vision of the world new ways of looking at specific areas of interest, including theology, that will be more attuned with the modern mind and more effective in dealing with both ultimate and proximate questions.

In chapter two one of the major elements of Vico's mature thought was seen to be the discovery of history as a valid form of knowledge in which human reality is revealed through its stages of growth, through its states of mind, through the manifestations of man's creative powers. Vico's theory is a form of historicism which may need to be qualified as moderate, or limited, in contrast with Croce's absolute historicism. But human reality is historical for Vico, and any philosophy, or metaphysic of the mind, to use his terminology, must begin and remain rooted in the concrete of history. It is this aspect of Vico's thought that has earned him the greatest praise from contemporary authors. John H. Nota regards Vico as "a true pioneer who understood that things historical had a character of their own."[13] Karl Löwith describes the Scienza nuova as "the fruit of a lifelong search into the depth of historic humanity," and "the most original advance toward a philosophy of history"; in his estimation Vico anticipates many of the major nineteenth century authors, not only in the area of the theory

---

[13] Nota, Phenomenology and History, translated by Louis Grooten and the author (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1967), p. 13.

XUM

of history, such as Herder, Hegel and Dilthey, but also in specific subjects of history, such as Niebuhr and Mommsen for some discoveries in Roman history, and Marx and Sorel for the attention paid to class struggles.[14] In the same vein, Bruce Mazlish makes a most sweeping claim by saying that Vico's work "foreshadowed the entire modern approach to the study of man's past," and especially "the development of historicism."[15] And, to choose just one more broad assessment of Vico from the many still available, Patrick Gardiner, in his collection of readings on theories of history, concludes his introduction to selections from the Scienza nuova with these words:

> No set of extracts can do justice to the variety and originality of Vico's ideas. If today some of his remarks seem almost obvious, this only shows how far we have moved in a direction he was the first to indicate. It is this that makes it not unreasonable to regard this book, despite its many obscurities and eccentricities, as providing the ground-plan for a whole new mode of thinking.[16]

The new mode of thinking is that of an historical understanding of reality, or at least of human reality, which has affected so much of contemporary thinking. If it is true, particularly, that "history is the most comprehensive horizon of Christian theology," and that "all theological questions and answers are meaningful only within the framework of the history which God has with humanity and through humanity with his whole creation"[17]; and if it is true that this new mode of thinking came to self-conscious realization and expression in Giambattista Vico, then it should be possible to discover a positive correlation between Vico's thought and those formulations of contemporary theology that more deeply reflect this way of thinking. The revolution in thought produced by the appearance of historical consciousness and the development of historical criticism has called forth a continuing reappraisal of Christianity's basic assumptions, due to the fact that the Judeo-Christian tradition is "preoccupied with history in a way that most other religions are not."[18] The issues are many and varied: the question of the historical Jesus, the relationship between the faith of a Christian today and the historical Jesus, the historicity and contextuality of doctrine, the question of a continuing revelation in history, eschatology and the end of history, and many others. This chapter will deal with the broader issue of the relationship of history and theology, and with specific issues only as demanded by the study of the overarching concern. There is no intent to treat systematically the history of the problem in a chronological or causal investigation. This has been done very competently by several authors and from different perspectives. Their conclusions will be assumed and used in order to gain a better understanding of the present status of the problem of theology and history.

---

[14] Löwith, Meaning in History (Phoenix Books, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 115.

[15] Mazlish, The Riddle of History: The Great Speculators from Vico to Freud (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 12.

[16] Gardiner, Theories of History: Readings from Classical and Contemporary Sources (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1959), p. 12.

---

[17] Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Redemptive Event and History," _Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics_, Claus Westermann, ed., p. 314.

[18] Van A. Harvey, _The Historian and the Believer: The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief_ (Macmillan Paperbacks, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1969), pp. 265, 246.

The very complex and unavoidable question of how historians understand history will be examined first. This will be followed by a discussion of the meaning of history, thus leading to the area of theology, since one way to talk about the meaning of history is in a theology of history. But a theology of history is neither the only nor perhaps the best way of relating history to theology. A further question needs to be asked: what happens if theology fully respects the autonomy of the historian, and instead of offering theological answers for historical questions, accepts the results of historical research as a starting point, or a framework, or data for theological reflection? What happens if the historicity of dogma, or the horizon of history, or the historicity of religious experience are taken seriously, without trying to make exceptions for theological problems?

It must be said at the onset that there is very little theology to be found in Vico, and whatever theological questions are treated explicitly give no indication that he had been able to apply his historical thought to this set of questions, with the exception of the notion of providence. Whatever vitality Vico might have for theology must be sought in his philosophical thought and historical attitude as the framework for theological reflection.

Giovanni di Napoli has a paragraph that seems to suggest some intriguing possibilities. He says that the Scienza nuova

> ...intends to be the demonstration of the incarnation of that verum underlying the consideration of historical becoming, and witnessed by that becoming in fact that Vico wants to present to us. If such is the case, then the verum of metaphysic, which he presumes incarnate in the factum of historical becoming, is not exhausted in the becoming of the factum. Here is the synthesis of the verum with the factum, without reducing and dissolving the verum in the factum.[19]

Is it possible, is it fruitful to consider the theological verum, the truth of theology as incarnate in the factum of history, in historical becoming? But before venturing to suggest any kind of answer to this question, it is necessary to look at the question of history.

I. The Question of History

There are innumerable ways of asking the question: what is history; let alone of trying to answer it. The study of history cannot escape the pluralistic climate of the present time, since the historian looks at the past but is located in the present. In history, just as throughout the whole range of human experience, easy consensus is difficult to find, and simplistic explanations difficult to accept. By way of illustration, it will be sufficient to call attention to the number of anthologies that have been published to provide the student of history with the opportunity to become acquainted with the complexities encountered in the reading and the writing of history. One of the best available is entitled, precisely, The Varieties of History. It is a collection of twenty-five essays edited by Fritz Stern. His criterion was to choose only from practicing historians, and the point to be made is that the differences in the understanding of history will be found not only between historians of widely separate times, between Voltaire and Jacques Barzun, for example, but also between contemporary historians, such as Thomas C. Cochran and Richard Hofstadter.[20]

---

[19] Di Napoli, "Discussione," Campanella e Vico (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1969), p. 336.

A basic distinction that cannot be ignored and must be made explicit is the one between history as a discipline and history as a total view of reality. The first is the field of study of the historian, and asks historical questions, questions about the past and about the manner and the method by which the present can come to a knowledge of the past. The second is a comprehensive standpoint which sees reality as history, and asks metaphysical and/or theological questions, questions about the ultimately real seen from the perspective of its historical nature. There is also a third question that may be asked, perhaps to be placed between the question of history as a discipline and history as reality, namely the question of the meaning of history. This might be described as the question of the philosophy of history. These are the three questions that will be asked here. The reasons for this choice are that all three approaches are present in Vico's *Scienza nuova*, and that the three perspectives need to be understood and kept distinct in trying to reflect on the significance of history for the work of theology.

---

[20] The Varieties of History: From Voltaire to the Present, edited, selected and introduced by Fritz Stern (Meridian Books, Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1956). See p. 347 for Stern's introduction to Cochran and Hofstadter, who differ on the issue of whether history belongs with the social sciences or with the humanities.

1. The Discipline of History.

What is history for the historian? The most appropriate methodology in searching for the answer to this question would seem to be to let the historians speak for themselves as much as possible. The goal is not to build an artificial consensus, but to describe the kind of agreement which, although in the midst of differences and varieties, still makes it possible to speak of history and historian with some common understanding.

History is the study of man's past. Every historian would probably want to qualify this statement, but, as a starting point, it contains at least two essential elements for the understanding of history, namely the human element and the time element, together forming the human past. Henri Marrou prefers to speak of the "knowledge of man's past," because knowledge is the goal and the "study" is only the means to that end.[21] For Marc Bloch the intervention of history is dictated by "the appearance of the human element," because "it is man that history seeks to grasp"; not just "man" in the abstract, but men, men in society, and men in time.[22] Mandelbaum wants to restrict the meaning, so that not all human facts will be called historical, but only those that are "seen in the light of their consequences for the social structure in which human beings exist," and he would say that "the field of the historian is the study of human activities in their social context and with their societal implications."[23] To this another historian might answer that the definition shows a sociological bias. While a positivistic historian would stress more the event character of history, the idealist historian would insist that the key to history is the mind of man. Collingwood speaks of the outside and the inside of an event, and of the task of the historian as that of "investigating not mere events... but actions, and an action is the unity of the outside and inside of an event." For the historian the cause of the event "means the thought in the mind of the person by whose agency the event came about: and this is not something other than the event, it is the inside of the event itself."[24] And of course Benedetto Croce would go even further and declare that all history is the history of thought and that history and philosophy coincide.[25] A philosopher looking at history begins with a comparable definition: "The discipline of history will then be seen to be primarily that branch of learning which deals with man in the past." But by the end of the study it has become "that branch of learning which aims at a systematic pursuit and handing down of knowledge about mankind's growth in adultness, insofar as this growth is revealed in the past."[26] And a theologian, Alan Richardson, borrows an image to pinpoint his understanding of history, an image that seems to demand much reflection: "The picture which we form of the past must not be

---

[21] Henri-Irénée Marrou, The Meaning of History, Robert J. Olsen, trans. (Baltimore: Helicon Press, Inc., 1966), p.33. The original French title is more accurate: De la connaissance historique.

[22] Marc Bloch, The Historian's Craft, introduction by Joseph R. Strayer, trans. by Peter Putnam (Vintage Books, New York: Random House, 1953), pp. 25-27.

[23] Maurice Mandelbaum, The Problem of Historical Knowledge: An Answer to Relativism (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1938), pp. 9-10.

---

[24] R. G. Collingwood, The Idea of History (London: Oxford University Press Paperback, 1969), pp. 213-15.

[25] See, e.g., Teoria e storia della storiografia, 6th edition (Bari: Gius. Laterza e Figli, 1948), pp. 16, 286.

[26] Nota, op. cit., pp. 15, 102.

XUM

compared to a photograph but to a painting."[27]

Vico's new science is a study of the common nature of nations, as the title proclaims, a study of all human institutions, as he carefully identified them in the drawing which he had made to place opposite the title page and in the long explanation of it; and this new science is made possible by the fact that human beings are social and by the discovery that a history of human thought could be developed by studying its concrete manifestations in history.[28]

The goal of historical study and research is knowledge, understanding of the human past. For Wilhelm Dilthey historical understanding is the recapture of meaning through historical evidence, the meaning that is present in human awareness and becomes "embedded in the meaning of institutions, organizations and historical processes."[29] Dilthey rejected the dilemma of bare, disjointed facts versus a metaphysical interpretation of history, and made one of the cornerstones of his approach the conviction that "human life and history are meaningful."

---

[27] Alan Richardson, *History Sacred and Profane* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), p. 183,quoting Walther Hofer, "Towards a Revision of the German Concept of History," Hans Kohn, ed., *German History: Some New German Views* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1954), p. 188.

[28] See, e.g., Vico, *Scienza nuova* III (1744), #2, 42, 347, 349.

[29] H. P. Rickman, "General Introduction," *Pattern and Meaning in History: Thoughts on History and Society, Wilhelm Dilthey* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), p. 33.

XUM

> There is indeed nothing like the meaning of life or of history and, if there were, it would not concern the historian in his research. But, on the other hand, there is--in a quite unmysterious way--meaning everywhere in life and it is with this kind of meaning that the historian too is concerned.[30]

The notion of meaning raises all kinds of questions and problems, from the search for a total meaning of history to the continuing debate about facts and their interpretation. The impossible claims made for scientific history in the nineteenth century regarding the possibility of letting events simply speak for themselves produced a number of reactions in the twentieth century, such as "the historical relativists, men who, like Carl Becker and Charles A. Beard in America, scoffed at what they regarded as the naive appeal to facts and to the value-free judgments of the historian."[31] Van A. Harvey has a very perceptive discussion of the whole question, especially in reference to the question of the Christian believer's approach to history. He rejects the claim of the attitude he calls "hard perspectivism," namely, that the distinction between facts and interpretation is meaningless and that only the perspective of the historian need be considered. There has to be some way of denoting what every historian will accept as a legitimate claim. The term "fact" does that by pointing to "that which we are inclined to accept as indubitable on the basis of certain common data and warrants."[32] On the other hand the historian's perspective and the interpretation of the data is also an essential part of the work of history. It is not sufficient to say that every historian has his own presuppositions. The issue is not whether objectivity can be attained, but "whether within the limits of human observation, which is necessarily selective, there are some standards for judging" what one will accept as true.[33] Van A. Harvey believes that there are such standards, and while not everyone will accept without qualifications the model that he presents, most historians will accept the general thesis that there are standards of historical scholarship, that reliable history can be written when the historian is motivated by the "will to truth," the legacy of the last century, and working with the kind of human candor, openness and honesty that is predicated on the possibility of self-transcendence, "the ability of human beings to enter imaginatively into possibilities of understanding and valuation not their own, to appreciate alien claims, to evaluate and assess them, and to commit onself to them."[34] Fritz Stern has a

---

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[31] Van A. Harvey, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

---

[32] Ibid., p. 222.

[33] Ibid., p. 209.

[34] Ibid., p. 221. See the whole Chapter VII, "The Morality of Historical Knowledge and the Perspective Theory of History." Harvey's model of history is the "field-encompassing-field." This model and a method for the assessment of historical evidence are presented in Chapter II.

XUM

quotation that expresses the whole problem very succinctly: "The central problems of a historical methodology or epistemology hinge upon the fact that an objective knowledge of the past can only be attained through the subjective experience of the scholar."[35]

The question of interpretation leads to the question of the validity of historical knowledge. Historical knowledge is a valid form of knowledge, although without the assurance of certainty, and in this history is not very different from any other type of knowledge: there is not much room for absolute certainties in the modern mind. "So far as it finds certainty only by estimating the probable and the improbable, historical criticism is like most other sciences of reality, except that it undoubtedly deals with a more subtle gradation of degrees."[36] And Marrou expresses it this way:

> Our knowledge of the past is what we believe to be true from what we have understood of what the documents have preserved for us.
>
> ...
>
> Historical certitude is never more than a probability which it would seem perhaps unreasonable to question--or at least there would be insufficient reason for doing so. Like the pragmatists, we might say that it provides a "practical satisfactoriness."[37]

But Stern insists that the historian's commitment to truth remains, and the impossibility of attaining absolute truth only increases his responsibility.[38]

---

[35] Stern, op. cit., p. 25, quoting Hajo Holborn.

[36] Marc Bloch, op. cit., p. 133.

[37] Marrou, op. cit., pp. 143, 125.

The demand of objectivity in nineteenth century historiography was also expressed in the demand for the detachment of the historian from his material. This had the result, among others, of focusing the attention on the relationship of the historian to history, of the historical past to the historian's present. For Croce, representing at the other extreme an idealistic view of history, the past does not really exist anymore except as it is recreated in the mind of the historian. For Dilthey historical understanding is the rediscovery of the I in the Thou, for Bloch the ability to understand the living is the master quality of the historian, and Marrou develops his approach to historical knowledge on the basis of a dialectics of the Same and the Other, involving an open mind, the willingness to come forth from the self and be enriched by the other, but also a measure of sameness if understanding is to take place.[39] For him the object, the past, cannot be isolated from the subject, the historian, except by a formal distinction: "History is the result of the creative effort by which the historian, as the conscious subject, establishes a relationship between the past which he evokes and the present which is his own."[40]

---

[38] Stern, op. cit., p. 26.

[39] See Croce, Teoria e storia della storiografia, pp. 95, 101; Dilthey, in Rickman, op. cit., p. 67; Bloch, op. cit., p. 43; Marrou, op. cit., pp. 92-100.

[40] Marrou, op. cit., pp. 39, 57.

The fact that the historian is involved in history does not mean, of course, that he can be careless or deliberately biased in the face of the evidence, and so distort or falsify his data and their meaning for the sake of extrinsic ideologies or even higher principles. Marc Bloch returns to von Ranke's famous formula, that the aim of history is to describe things as they really happened and discusses its ambiguity. He rejects the notion of the passivity of the historian before the facts implied in it, but he accepts it as a counsel of integrity. The problem is stated by Bloch as one of impartiality: the historian is never just passive before the data, he does not merely reproduce them, rather he analyzes them, but he does so impartially, in honest submission to the truth. The scholar, who is different from a judge in a court of law, stops short of passing sentence on the basis of categories of good and evil derived from outside of history.[41] There is hardly a historian today who does not look for a critical and scholarly approach to history, requiring such factors as an awareness of fundamental presuppositions, disciplined inquiry, and an adequate methodology.

The methodological and technical aspects of historiography are not pertinent to the purpose of this discussion of history. But this seems the proper place to look briefly at Giambattista Vico as a historian, since this facet of his work has not yet been treated explicitly.

---

[41] Marc Bloch, op. cit., pp. 138-39.

The involvement of the historian with the object of his study is well expressed by Vico in a passage already quoted, where he recalls the difficulty of twenty years of reflection, the cost of trying to enter into the mentality of primitive and savage people in order to understand them.[42]

Interpretation, or re-interpretation is the main feature of Vico as a historian. Some of his re-interpretations are totally subjective and arbitrary, and could be used as classic examples of the methodological faux-pas of making the data fit one's preconceived ideas. But there are enough extraordinary and original insights in his work to stamp it with the mark of genius. And his overall approach to historical data is to question all the accepted interpretations and to propose new ways of understanding the material. Some of the best known results of this attitude in Vico are his re-interpretations of the law of the XII Tables in Rome, the authorship of the Homeric poems, and ancient mythology.

Enough has been said, especially in chapter two, about Vico's view on the validity of historical knowledge. Practically everyone acquainted with his work attributes to Vico the great merit of having vindicated the value and the autonomy of history against the ascendancy of natural sciences as the result of the success of the experimental method, and the dismissal of history by Descartes as incapable of yielding clear and distinct ideas.

---

[42] Vico, Scienza nuova III (1744), #338; see supra, p.84.

Vico also developed some canons of historical study, which he used himself and explicitly proclaimed. When seen in the context of the first twenty-five years of the eighteenth century they can only be described as startingly new. Again, much has been said about Vico's guiding principle, namely that ancient history can best be understood through the modifications of the human mind, through a study of the gradual development of consciousness, thought, and the institutions that embodied it. More specifically, Vico insists that civilizations are not simply derived one from another, but they each manifest a similar creative power which will be discovered as a common sense of humanity when civilizations meet; certain stages of history have a specific character and their understanding will be aided by comparison with like stages even though they may be chronologically distant; and he believed that similar periods tend to appear in the same sequence, although there are exceptions and history cannot be treated as a cycle of fixed phases, for they return in different forms, and the unpredictability and creativity of history prevent the forecasting of the future. His negative canons warn about the conceit of nations (seeing one's national history in the most favorable light), the conceit of the learned (believing that one is in possession of the wisdom of the ancients), the tendency to hold grandiose opinions about ancient times, and the prejudice of assuming that ancient authors are better informed about primitive times or understand them better because they were closer to them. Positively, he proposes and illustrates the use of linguistic studies to throw light on history, the re-interpretation of myth as a poetic way of expressing the history and social structures of the people who created them, and the effort to look behind popular traditions for themes of truth expressed in them in their origins.[43]

Vico may also be the starting point for a mention of two other considerations about history. The first is the aspect of communication: the work of the historian normally results in a narrative, in the telling of the story, in one way or another. Vico felt so strongly about the imperative to share his discoveries that he was willing to publish the Scienza nuova prima at his own expense and did not hesitate to sell his most precious material possession in order to do it. When the results of historical inquiry are made available they become exposed to the review, criticism, and study by other competent scholars, a process of dialogue that is bound to enhance the cause of historical studies. This is the process that unfortunately never became available to Vico, because his work was never taken seriously during his lifetime: the Scienza nuova probably would have been a better, clearer, more cohesive work, if Vico had not been forced to work at it so completely alone. The second consideration is that of the autonomy of the historian: whether or not he was aware of the revolutionary nature of his thought, Vico continued to work at it passionately and to proclaim it, undaunted, almost spurred on, by incomprehension, indifference, personal setbacks and attacks. Among contemporary authors, Van A. Harvey treats of the autonomy of the historian in an extensive and forceful manner. He speaks of it in terms of the "new morality of knowledge," which includes allowing for rational assessment, using sound judgment, and thinking in terms of the new world picture. On the subject of autonomy he states:

---

[43] See Vico, Scienza nuova III (1744), #348-60; also Collingwood, The Idea of History, pp. 67-70; Amerio, Introduzione allo studio di G. B. Vico, pp. 470-87.

> The historian, in short, is radically autonomous because of the nature of historical knowledge itself. If the historian permits his authorities to stand uncriticized, he abdicates his role as critical historian. He is no longer a seeker of knowledge but a mediator of past belief; not a thinker but a transmitter of tradition.[44]

Among the many questions that still could be raised on the subject of history, there is one more that looms particularly large in a study intending to relate the disciplines of history and theology, and that is the question of the unity of history. One form of the question is the disjunction of sacred and profane history. At the time of Vico sacred history meant biblical history, the revealed story of the origins and development of the human race. A few voices had been raised to challenge this view, such as Spinoza and Richard Simon, but the acceptance of the Bible as the true history of the world was not seriously questioned until the nineteenth century. A curious thing happens in Vico: on the one hand he accepts the traditional view and bases his chronology on the biblical data as understood at his time; on the other hand he wants to bracket sacred history and set it aside, as an exception to the human history that he had discovered, because he cannot reconcile the two. He does not always succeed, and occasionally he makes a foray into sacred history and uses it as an example, giving the impression that, almost unconsciously, he wants to apply his canons to the whole of human civilization, without exceptions: however, this desire, if it is really present in him, never quite reaches the explicit level. Today the terminology of sacred and profane history reflects the disjunction between salvation history and secular history, as if there were two parallel histories, so to speak, one of purely human events, and another, either independent of it, or part of it but not attainable by ordinary historical research, or breaking into it and disturbing its continuity: the history of God's dealings with man. It would seem that today the historians, as historians, hold that there is only one history, the history of man's past, unless one wants to divide man or return to the two-story Medieval image of the world. Even a theologian writing on History Sacred and Profane, concludes that this question has been settled in the second half of the twentieth century, when "the history of the world has unified itself in a wholly unprecedented way...because from now on onwards the whole world will share a common history."[45] For Alan Richardson, if there is a difference or a disunity, it will be in the disjunction of the sacred and profane interpretation of the one history.

---

[44] Harvey, op. cit., p. 42.

A second form of the question of the unity of history could be phrased in terms such as these: is there one meaning to history, is there a unified view of history, is there one single interpretation for the whole of history? These are philosophical questions, and they lead to a different level, requiring separate treatment.

2. The Question of the Meaning of History.

Is there a rational meaning inherent to the historical process, that gives it unity and coherence, that accounts for the irrational elements that continue to surface in its course? Does history have a purpose and a goal? Is there direction to its movement, a direction that can be discovered and understood by man through the study of history? Is another source of knowledge necessary for the final interpretation of history, as philosophical reason or theological revelation? Or is history, as described in the preceding pages, chaotic and accidental, the result of random chance and choices, without ultimate meaning? What a profusion of answers has been given to these questions in the history of thought, especially in the last three hundred years, answers both optimistic and tragic, hopeful and despairing!

---

[45] Alan Richardson, op. cit., pp. 266, 267.

Two observations are necessary before proceeding to a schematic consideration of some of these answers: (i) The first point to be made, or a standpoint to make explicit, is that meaning and unity in history are still questions. Marrou states this attitude well when he says: "...one must prove and not merely postulate the existence of a unified structure, of a coherent whole, of a Zusammenhang. Unity is a problem, not a primary principle to be used as a point of departure."[46] And Paul Ricoeur speaks eloquently of the tension experienced between "the pluralization of the orders of truth in our cultural history" and "the ambiguous nature of our will to unity, at once the goal of reason and violence." As a result any synthesis proposed by the philosophy of history has a "merely probable character."[47] (ii) The discipline of history does occasionally speak of the meaning and significance of an event or a period, once they are completed. To the extent that a period, for instance, has a definite beginning and end, it can be studied as a whole and the historian may be able to speak of its meaning in terms of origins, duration, and completion.

---

[46] Marrou, op. cit., p. 181.

[47] Paul Ricoeur, History and Truth, trans. with an Introduction by Charles A. Kelbley (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), p. 166, and the whole essay "Truth and Falsehood," pp. 165-191.

Löwith suggests that the words "meaning" and "purpose" are interchangeable, so that to speak of the meaning of history is equivalent to saying that it has a purpose. But purpose also implies a goal, or an end term.[48] If this view is accepted, there is no way for the historian as such to speak of the meaning of the whole of history, because it is still in progress, and any positing of an ultimate purpose and final end must come from imagination, conjecture, extrapolation, projection, a priori categories or divine revelation. Thus the discussion moves from the level of history to that of the philosophy or the theology of history.

Much has been written on the philosophy of history, and the only reason for dealing with it here is to present a logical progression and movement of thought from history towards a historicized theology. For this reason the question will be treated in a rather schematic way. The various efforts for a total interpretation of history may be grouped in at least three basic schools, which will now be briefly examined.

---

[48] Karl Löwith, Permanence and Change, pp. 36-37; also, Meaning in History, p. 5. But see his Nature, History, and Existentialism, p. 24, for a slight qualification of the statement.

(i) The first general grouping would include all the authors who deny the possibility of a philosophy of history, either by denying that there is any ultimate meaning to be found (or that it can be known, if there is a meaning), or by affirming that the source of meaning is outside or beyond history, and so beyond the competence of the historian.

One way to identify the first denial is to associate it with the work of Sartre, for whom human existence is basically meaningless, both individually and socially, therefore historically. Sartre's man and Sartre's thought have been called unhistorical, because there is no continuity possible, no past available in the ever-annihilating *pour-soi*. But this evaluation may need to be qualified, if his statement in the *Critique de la raison dialectique* (1960), that he considers Marxism "as the unsurpassable philosophy of our time," is to be taken at face value, since Marxism is a philosophy of history.[49]

Karl Löwith has written extensively and brilliantly in the field of the philosophy of history. He defines it as a "systematic interpretation of universal history in accordance with a principle by which historical events and successions are unified and directed toward an ultimate meaning."[50]

---

[49] See Nota, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-61; Marrou, *op. cit.*, p.223.

[50] Löwith, *Meaning in History*, p. 1.

XUM

But he insists that the problem, so stated, cannot be answered from within the perspective of history. Since history is still on the move its purpose must lie ahead in the future: "The assumption, then, that history on the whole may have an ultimate meaning, anticipates an ultimate purpose as an ultimate goal."[51] Neither historical nor philosophical reason, however, have the ability to establish a meaningful plan of history. And so the philosophy of history becomes totally dependent on a theology of history, "in particular on the theological concept of history as a history of fulfillment and salvation."[52] Löwith rejects the modern view of man as an exclusively historical being and the stressing of history as the unique destiny and responsibility of man. He interprets the course of the philosophy of history, from Voltaire to Toynbee, as a distortion of the Judeo-Christian view of the world and of the Christian theology of history, and an alienation from the vision of classical antiquity that saw man as part of the cosmos. Ultimate meaning for human existence may be found only by restoring man to his proper place in the order of nature or by recalling the eschatological dimension of Christianity, so that Christian thought will no longer confuse the event of salvation with world history.[53] Löwith seems to agree with Burckhardt: the only principle of unity that is available to the historian within history is that of continuity, which is not just a continuous succession but also "a conscious effort in remembering and renewing our heritage."[54]

---

[51] Löwith, Permanence and Change, p. 37.

[52] Löwith, Meaning in History, p. 1.

[53] See, ibid., pp. 191-203.

(ii) A second general grouping could be identified as those philosophies of history which discover an ultimate explanation of history within the historical process itself.

The most prominent of this group, because of the power of its inner logic and its attraction for many people today, is Marxism, or dialectical materialism. Marx was profoundly influenced by Hegelian philosophy from which he derived the view of history as a dynamic process, the principle of the dialectic movement of history, the inner necessity of the successive stages of history. But he rejected Hegel's central idea of Absolute Spirit and substituted for it man in his concrete materiality and in the process of material production. Man, homo faber, is the subject of history:

> The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can be made only in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and their material conditions of life, including those which they find already in existence and those produced by their activity. These premises can thus be established in a purely empirical way.[55]

---

[54] Ibid., p. 22.

[55] Marx, from The German Ideology, in Gardiner, op. cit., p. 126. See also Gardiner's introduction to the selections, p. 125.

Man is the subject of history not because he contemplates it, but because he makes it, and makes himself in the process, by his activity. Marx was also influenced by Feuerbarch's idea that many of man's ideologies arise from the material conditions in which men live, and by Saint-Simon's theory of economics and social conflicts as the determinants of history. The ideal of human life, for Marx, is in the unity of subject and object, understood as the unity of man as producer with the object of his production. The rise of capitalistic society has alienated man from the products of his activity, but the dialectic of the process contains within itself the movement to emancipate man. The proletariat will rise and the social revolution will bring forth the new stage, the classless society, where the process of labor and production will recapture its lost unity. There is an eschatological, utopian element in Marx's view of history, but always within this world and this material history, controlled by the laws of production, distribution, and consumption, and understood as "the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations, each standing on the shoulders of the preceding one."[56] A modern Marxist warns that to speak of Marxist theory simply as a descriptive theory of history open to value judgments

---

[56] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, The German Ideology, R. Pascal, ed. (New York Paperbacks, New York: International Publishers, 1949), p. 35.

XUM

and added values from other sources, is to misunderstand it. Historical necessity is not a blind law, and Marx rejected the notion of value judgments apart from historical development: this would be alienated history. In the class consciousness of the proletariat history and historical consciousness are identified: there is no need for outside ideals to justify the process of historical materialism, because freedom reappears in the proletariat, and the class struggle will lead the return to man's true essence.[57] It is here that the historicism of Marx seems to break down, because Marxist alienation seems to imply an ideal human nature, while Marxist thought insists that man is what he makes of himself through the historical process.

(iii) A third attitude towards history would be to affirm that there are unity and meaning and direction in history, but the principles for discovering and interpreting these elements must be found outside the data of history.

Historically this position appeared first as a theology of history, appealing to the action and the intentional plan of God to explain actual events and the final goal of history.

Israel did not rely on a notion of abstract or absolute time, time divorced from specific events: events and

---

[57] From notes of a seminar lecture by Prof. Leszek Kolakowski, author of Toward a Marxist Humanism: Essays on the Left Today, Jane Zielonko Peel, trans. (New York: Grove Press, 1968).

XUM

time belong together. In ancient times the rhythm of festivals expressed the rhythm of time. For Israel, as well as for its neighbors, the original roots of their feasts was probably the cycle of the natural year. But soon the agrarian festivals were historicized, and they became the celebrations of the mighty acts of God. A momentous change in awareness is here implied, Israel's realization that its being was the result of a series of events, of a history, a sequence of events that were the acts of God. And this "fundamental thought that history can only exist as the times in which God performed his acts and gave his guidance never altered" in subsequent times.[58] Even the earliest expressions of Israel's faith in Yahweh reflected this view and connected the name of God with some statement about his action in history. One of the most important is the passage in Deut. 26:5-9. It is a confession of faith, perhaps a liturgical creed, which recapitulates the main events of Israel's history, from the time of the patriarchs to the time of the conquest.[59]

The most explicit of the Christian writers on the question of history is probably Saint Augustine. His City of God is a sweeping theology of history which dominated the view of history for Christianity in the West for a thousand years. Augustine rejects the cyclic view of the world that had been prevalent in Greek and Roman thought on history. For Augustine the death and resurrection of Jesus is an event that cannot be repeated, and history can move only in one direction, namely, towards the second coming of Jesus in glory and the fullness of the heavenly city. True history, therefore, becomes the pilgrimage of the city of God towards its consummation outside of history. Secular history loses its significance apart from the meaning that revelation gives to it, because the only possibility of a universal understanding of historical events comes from the principles of faith. Within the order of genuine history, the function of historical institutions, such as Rome, is to preserve peace and order so that the truth of the Gospel may prevail. Consequently, the temporal is judged in the light of the eternal, and passing historical events need to be studied for their spiritual and moral significance.[60]

---

[58] Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), II, p. 107 and pp. 99-112.

[59] See ibid., I, pp. 121-23.

Löwith sees in Hegel the systematic attempt to reduce to a philosophical system the grandiose picture presented by the Christian theology of history.[61] The notion of divine providence in history is transformed into "the cunning of reason," which Croce has compared to Vico's providential action, and the process of history is not just the unfolding of the plan of God for the world, but the development of "the one universal Spirit," which through the Nations "elevates and completes itself to a self-comprehending totality."[62] Hegel's philosophy of history is a development of his philosophy of logic, with its notions of reality as intelligible in ideal terms, reality as a dynamic, developing process, and the dialectic pattern of reality and reason. The philosophy of history is part of the philosophy of Spirit:

---

[60] See Frederick Copleston, A History of Philosophy, vol. II, Mediaeval Philosophy: Augustine to Scotus (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1952), pp. 85-90. It should be noted that Henri Marrou, quoted above, p.181 as saying that unity in history is not a given but a starting problem, finds the answer in an Augustinian theology of history, in the book Time and Timeliness (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969), which is a beautiful statement not of a historian but of a believer. The original title was Théologie de l'histoire.

[61] Löwith, Meaning in History, pp. 54-55.

> It must be observed at the outset, that the phenomenon we investigate--Universal History--belongs to the realm of Spirit. The term "World," includes both physical and psychical Nature. Physical Nature also plays its part in the World's History, and attention will have to be paid to the fundamental natural relations thus involved. But Spirit, and the course of its development, is our substantial object. Our task does not require us to contemplate Nature as a Rational System in itself--though in its own proper domain it proves itself such--but simply in its relation to Spirit. On the stage on which we are observing it--Universal History--Spirit displays itself in its most concrete reality.[63]

The idea whose course of development is seen in history is the idea of freedom, which is of the essence of Spirit. But ultimately the primary concern is Spirit, and not history:

> While we are thus concerned exclusively with the Idea of Spirit, and in the History of the World regard

---

[62] Hegel, The Philosophy of History, in Gardiner, op. cit., p. 72.

[63] Ibid., p. 61.

> everything as only his manifestation, we have, in traversing the past--however extensive its periods--only to do with what is present; for philosophy, as occupying itself with the True, has to do with the eternally present. Nothing in the past is lost for it, for the Idea is ever present; Spirit is immortal; with it there is no past, no future, but an essential now.[64]

The nineteenth century was dominated by the thought of Hegel, and its influence was felt both by the authors who accepted it as well as by those who reacted against it. It is certainly one of the most powerful systems of rational, ideal interpretation of reality.

The Hegelian system may also serve to bring out the problematic character of the uses of a philosophy or a theology of history. For Hegel the development of Absolute Spirit reaches its ideal climax in his own philosophy, and the historical embodiment of it is to be found in the Prussian state. But the problem can be stated in more universal terms. Paul Ricoeur does it incisively in relationship with the history of philosophy, and uses the models of the "system" and the "singular." According to the "system" "the sum total of philosophies would form one single philosophy in which historical philosophies would be particular moments."[65] According to the "singular" model "each philosophy will be understood so much the better if one has thoroughly penetrated its singularity."[66] It is the perennial tension between the universal and the individual, the reality of pluralism and the need for unity. But neither model is satisfactory, both models give only the appearance of meaning, both tend to a gigantic loss, the loss of history: "The system is the end of history because history becomes nullified in Logic; singularity too is the end of history since all history is repudiated in it."[67] What then? Ricoeur concludes that history remains history only to the extent that it is neither absorbed into universal history nor lost in absolute singularity, to the extent that it is willing to retain its confusion and ambiguities, willing at the same time to accept universal history as an impossible task ("to search out all the relationships between all the partial totalities"), and to accept the absolutely singular as never attainable because of the forces and currents present in the anonymous and the collective.[68]

---

[64] Ibid., p. 72.

[65] Ricoeur, op. cit., p. 64. He adds: "A large part of the historian's work falls under the sway of this Hegelian model."

Can Vico be identified with any one of the three groups just outlined? No, not finally and exclusively. He certainly holds for the existence of unity and meaning in history. In the interpretation of Benedetto Croce, Vico would be a forerunner of Hegel and Croce, but in Croce

---

[66] *Ibid.*

[67] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

[68] *Ibid.*, p. 76.

Absolute Spirit has become the human mind and spirit, and therefore the principle of development is now immanent to the total process. Croce categorically rejects the notion of a philosophy of history, because he identifies philosophy and history in his absolute historicism, whereby history, as he understands it, becomes a total view of reality. But Croce's interpretation of Vico has been severely criticized recently. Löwith locates Vico between Bossuet and Voltaire, between a theology and a philosophy of history, because this is precisely his thesis, namely, that the absolutizing of history is the result of the passage from the Christian to the secular understanding of history.

Vico gives canons of historiography, but this is more a description of his own procedure than the setting of rules. The "ideal eternal history" can be interpreted as an a priori determination of history, either by the mind of God or by the structure of the human mind, but it can also be taken as the movement of ideality in time, as a goal always ahead and never fully to be realized. And his corsi e ricorsi can not only be understood as a cyclic view of history in the manner of Spengler, but also as a dialectic of the two moments of imagination and reflection, or even as a profound sense of the ambiguity stressed by Ricoeur: man always faces the possibility of returning to savagery, through the breakdown of civilization and the return to the solitary state of primitive man.

The thrust of this study has been to stress that Vico turned to history not for the purpose of solving historical problems but in a search for a valid form of human knowledge and a richer and more accurate understanding of man than the vision of man as a part of nature, to be known by the experimental method. Pietro Piovani shows that Vico's thought is neither a metaphysics of history nor a theology of history.[69] These are the limits within which Vico works: he neither makes history the final explanation of total reality, nor is he satisfied to let man's activity be explained by the action of God. His concern is man, and having sought him in humanistic studies and classical philosophy, in positive laws and the principles of universal law, he finds him in history, the process through which man has made himself: by reconstructing this process through the study of the development of civilization, the institutions which are the product of man and the instruments of his unfolding, he hoped to discover man. And yet man alone was not a sufficient explanation of the movement of history, and even in the history of the Gentile nations he found the presence of a provident God at work with man.

Vico's approach suggests the possibility of yet another approach to the problem of meaning and history.

---

[69] Piovani, "Vico e la filosofia senza natura," Campanella e Vico (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1969), p. 266.

3. Historical Understanding of Reality

This way of thinking implies a step in a different direction than the philosophy of history. It begins in history, but instead of asking the question of the ultimate meaning *of* history, it asks: can history furnish forms of thought that might be helpful to man in dealing with the question of meaning in his own being, in his activity, in his quest for ultimate reality?

Alan Richardson calls this way of thinking historical-mindedness, and describes it as "the conviction that we cannot understand our society and its institutions, even our lives and their problems, without understanding how they came to be what they are."[70] This statement bears a marked similarity to the famous *Degnità* XIV of the *Scienza nuova* (1744). For Richardson the modern mind can only understand the human situation historically, if at all.

Bruce Mazlish speaks of historical consciousness, as a personal and collective historical self-awareness, which has been deepened and extended by the whole complex phenomenon of the various philosophies of history. He describes two consequences of this historical self-awareness: first, it serves as the framework for most of the thinking in the cultural sciences and, secondly, it gives man a new vision of himself, in the sense that history has become the exclusive attribute of man, in place of such things as reason and language: "What is unique to man is his history."[71]

---

[70] Alan Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 156. See Vico, *Scienza nuova* III (1744), ¶147.

Gordon D. Kaufman prefaces his major effort towards a systematic theology by saying that his interpretation of the Christian faith proceeds from a radically historicist perspective, and he specifies the word "historicist" as "a viewpoint that understands the world in historical terms, and man in terms of the radical implications of his historicity."[72]

Historical consciousness is again the language of W. Taylor Stevenson. For him it means that "history is a way of perceiving and ordering the totality of human experience in which ultimate or sacral meaning is understood to be present in empirical and transitory phenomena."[73] Stevenson's thought needs more careful consideration not only because it is an explicit effort to develop an approach to theology in the framework of historical consciousness, but also because he uses Vico's thought as an integral part of his presentation.

For Stevenson historical consciousness implies a comprehensive view of the world and of reality, but it is not the kind of system whose truth can be argued conclusively on rational grounds. This would seem to place it, for Stevenson, in the category of foundational suppositions that are accepted either as an unquestioned part of a cultural climate or on the basis of faith and personal conviction. For those who accept the viewpoint, however, it is seen as giving the true story of the world. Further, historical consciousness begins with an understanding of man and of what man has made, but it expands to include everything else, even nature.

---

[71] Mazlish, The Riddle of History, pp. 456-57.

[72] Kaufman, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), p. xii, n. 3.

[73] Stevenson, op. cit., p. 15.

The main thesis of the book, History as Myth, as the title itself indicates, is that historical consciousness makes history function for modern man in the same way that myth did for ancient man, so that history becomes the central myth of Western man in the twentieth century. Stevenson proposes the work of Mircea Eliade as a broad consensus on the meaning of myth and then proceeds to show how history fits this particular view of myth and thus supports his contention that history is a mythic conception of reality:

> It is just these characteristics which we take to be the essential aspects of any myth: that it is the true story about the sacral power which invests man and the world; and, that it enables us to perceive and organize all realms of our experience. It is history, we would argue, which enables us to do this in our civilization; and consequently we would maintain that history is our myth.[74]

When Stevenson speaks of "sacral power" he is expressing the same concept which others would identify as "ultimate concern" or "ultimate reality."

---

[74] Ibid., p. 16.

Stevenson's position is that the origin of the myth of history must be located in the Judeo-Christian traditions, in the experiences described in the Old and the New Testament founded on the reality of the covenant between God and man, because it contains the following elements: the pattern of promise and fulfillment, the continuing participation of God in the history of man, the establishment of events (persons, places and times) with eternal significance, and the responsibility of man for the course of history.[75]

If the origin of historical consciousness is in the Old Testament, the appearance of its modern form, a conscious, deliberate, and critical approach to historical reality, is to be found in Vico. In him appears the conviction that history is a source of meaning, and man should be attentive to what happens in history. For Stevenson this is equivalent to his description of a person's participation in the myth of history.[76] Stevenson also capitalizes on the insights of Vico concerning myth, seen as a poetic, imaginative way of telling a true story, of describing original, constitutive encounters of man with his world and his own experience.

One more item in Stevenson's presentation must be mentioned at this time: he cautions that myth or "mythology" becomes objectionable when,

---

[75] Ibid., p. 19.

[76] See Ibid., pp. 38-39.

> losing sight of the fact that the closest we can come to reality is in our images or myths, we assert that our imagery or myth is a description of an objective reality which exists in some "other world."[77]

This seems to be a timely warning about human knowledge in general, and especially in the philosophical or theological mode. The statement also raises the question of the difficulty of using the language of myth today: on the one hand it can have the advantage of underlining the characteristic of knowledge as an image, a construct, an imaginative response or a rational abstraction; but, on the other hand, in the general understanding of myth today, its usage in this context will look suspect to many from the beginning because it can give the impression of having no real content, of being pure imagination and arbitrary interpretation.

In this presentation the term "historical understanding" will be used, rather than "historical consciousness." The reason for this choice is that "historical understanding" seems to express more clearly that this viewpoint is dealing with a way of knowing, of understanding, on a second level of reflection, the level of interpretation of historical experience and consciousness.

There are other assumptions implicitly contained in the viewpoint here presented which need to be made explicit. Stevenson shows that both the biblical record and Vico share the most fundamental conviction "that reality is historical in nature."[78] What is meant by this phrase? It is here understood in the following way:

---

[77] *Ibid.*, p. 131.

(i) It describes a way of knowing, rather than a way of being: a great number of contemporary persons first of all know themselves as human beings within a historical framework; they know themselves as coming from and being in history.

(ii) Historical understanding can furnish a framework for a man's will to know the whole of reality, so that even what has traditionally been called "nature" can be understood as historical: natural evolution may be described as a process of growth and development in space and time, and the ultimate composition of matter may be described using the term "events" taken analogically from human history.

(iii) Historical understanding is a way of seeing and speaking about ultimate reality, but it neither possesses it nor exhausts it; it remains an image, and it cannot be absolutized as if no other way of knowing could ever surpass it in the future or even be valid now. The sense of an ultimate mystery cannot be destroyed or ignored.

Perhaps there is no way to make historical understanding perfectly clear, but at least one has the obligation to

---

[78] Ibid., p. 54.

XUM

make every effort to communicate an idea as clearly as he can. This is the purpose of the paragraphs that follow.

(i) The fundamental stance of historical understanding is that becoming is the essence of being. Historical understanding looks at reality as a process of development, where development does not necessarily mean progress, but simply a continuity of change in which later events are affected by earlier ones in a cumulative process.

(ii) All knowing is contextual. In order to understand a person, or an institution, or a doctrine, one needs to understand their respective historical contexts. This is not a matter of adding more data, but of looking at things differently, in a way that is fully aware of the limitations of human knowledge, of human language, of inherited systems of thought, of specific perspectives.

(iii) All being is contextual. This implies a social conception of existence and reality: each person, institution, or movement, arises from its historical context and draws its very life-blood from it. Every being is to a greater or lesser extent the result of its historical circumstances and relationships. One consequence would be that all ideas, institutions, movements, all human thought and all its expressions, are dated in respect to their coming into being; they all began somewhere, sometime, in a particular set of circumstances. Therefore, they are limited, finite, and can always be surpassed.

(iv) There is no unchanging, ahistorical residue in the process of change, except that which has reached the end term of its process and is no longer actual, but only past. This applies to the identity of particular events or collective movements, to ideologies as well as to institutions: it is the concrete process that shapes and determines the enduring historical reality. By contrast, a substantialist view of reality would see a static, unchanging element in being which endures change and continues through the various accidental transformations.

(v) Historical understanding looks at history, and by extension to other aspects of reality, as the realm of freedom and decision, not only in the sense of choice between given alternatives, but especially in the sense of creativity and novelty. The past has shaped the present, has made it what it is, but the past is not the absolute norm of the future. Creativity means that each being has the opportunity to add something to the past, to go beyond it, to build upon and to enrich what it has received from the past, even though it may be required to turn in a new direction. In the question of human decisions the question of the relationship of the past to the present and the future is critical: it is always difficult to decide what and how much should be retained and what should be transcended. But the problem is not automatically solved and decided in advance by a rule of conformity and submissiveness to the past.

XUM

(vi) Man is at least partially responsible for the course of history and the shape of the future. He does not simply follow a blueprint already drawn out with all the specifications, he does not simply respond to absolute forces acting upon him either from within or from outside of history.

(vii) Historical understanding must live without the assurance of absolute certainty, because it shares in the nature of all historical knowledge: it leads to varying degrees of probability, to "what we believe to be true," to what it would be unreasonable to doubt. Having pushed an attempt to attain truth and validity to the furthest limits, man can function within these limits, which T. Z. Lavine has called "functional absolutes."[79]

Langdon Gilkey speaks of the sense of the historicity of man as "a typically modern concept," implying both man's experience of historical relativity as well as an affirmation of freedom "as the essential character of man and so as the necessary condition for human self-realization." He sees this affirmation as "one of the strongest voices of modernity and possibly the most creative."[80] But the roots

---

[79] Lavine, "Naturalism and the Sociological Analysis of Knowledge," Y.H. Krikorian, ed., Naturalism and the Human Spirit (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944), pp. 197ff. Quoted in Gordon D. Kaufman, Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 85-86.

[80] Langdon Gilkey, Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-Language (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969), p. 58.

XUM

of this modern view can be found in Vico.

Many, if not all, of the details of historical understanding just outlined have been foreshadowed in the analysis of Vico's thought. Suffice it to recall now that for Vico the nature of things or institutions is their being born at certain times and in certain fashions, and the light that broke through the darkness of history for him was the unquestionable truth that the world of civilization has been made by man, and therefore what has been made by man (the *factum*), as known through historical research (the *certum*), will make available the truth of what man is (the *verum*). But rather than repeat the material by making point by point comparisons, it seems more useful to restate the thrust of Vico's work and vision.

In his search for the possibility and the validity of knowledge Vico did not arrive at a philosophy or a theology of history, but rather to a way of thinking and understanding, a philosophy based in the concrete of history. As Piovani writes, Vico almost transforms philology, or history, "into a method to induce the Mystery to the temptation of revealing itself."[81] Moving away from the inclusion of man in the scientific study of nature, Vico locates the being of man not in nature but in history, and in his vision the natural universe becomes a civil, human universe. On the one hand Vico rejects a philosophy based on a mathematical understanding of nature, and therefore he does not speak of static essences and substance, but rather looks at the origin of things from the perspective of their being in motion. On the other hand, he brackets sacred history and the revelation contained in it, and so he does not use the supernatural to achieve an understanding of reality, but rather derives even the limited theology of the _Scienza nuova_ from history. For Vico providence follows human ways, and this is the difference between the action of God in history and in nature. Thus the _Scienza nuova_ turns out to be a renunciation of the possibility of comprehensive and final knowledge of both the natural and the supernatural realm for the sake of focusing on man.

---

[81] Piovani, "Vico e la filosofia senza natura," *Campanella e Vico* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1969), p. 257.

There is no intent here of giving the impression that this is the only proper way to understand Vico. By now it should be abundantly clear that there are many elements in Vico that would seem to suggest and perhaps even demand a different interpretation. The intent is to show that this is a legitimate way of reading Vico, one which an increasing number of scholars seem to be proposing. From this point of view Vico is suggesting that, instead of imposing upon history either a rational meaning derived from non-historical principles or a God acting from outside of history, there is another option, namely, of looking for the meaning that comes from history and for the God who has given himself to man in history.

Is this a legitimate option for Christian theology?

II. The Relationship of History and Theology

The meaning of the term "history" and its uses were discussed at some length in the first part of this chapter, but the same approach will not be repeated for the other term of the relationship. Instead of examining the various ways of understanding the term "theology," only one description of a possible meaning of the term will be offered, in order to proceed immediately to the matter of how theology, or at least this particular perspective on theology, is affected by the prevailing historical attitude of the contemporary mindset.

The ancient way of describing theology, namely, fides quaerens intellectum, would seem to be still applicable to a theology seen as a continuing attempt to conceptualize and communicate in word the experienceof faith. In this definition faith is understood in a Christian sense, i.e., as an encounter in trust with an ultimate reality named as personal and made present in Jesus Christ. And the experience of faith is accepted as historical, both in its personal as well as in its communal aspects, in the faith of an individual and in the faith of a people, because there is no purely personal experience that can take place without historical antecedents and a historical context. This is taken to be the meaning when Pannenberg says that "theological thought has to do precisely with reflection upon what is encountered in religious experience."[82]

It may also be helpful at this point to state explicitly that the philosophical framework of this view of theology is in the broad stream of a philosophy of process, one that emphasizes the on-going movement of things, rather than static structures, the act of becoming rather than the static mode of essence. The fundamental categories of this philosophical outlook would be those of creativity, purpose, freedom, relativity, concreteness, ambiguity.[83] Its world-view is a dynamic one, concerned with movement, activity, and life; and an organic view, stressing the importance of growth and the importance of relations; and a creative view, assuming the openness of events which allows for alternative outcomes and the possibility of emergence of the new, self-transcendence and creative advance; and it is a four-dimensional view, taking seriously the idea of a space-time continuum, where duration and movement in time are an internal constituent of events.

A process view of reality is in harmony with the attitude of historical understanding, and with Vico's basic attitude, for whom philosophy "is conceivable only as a historical relationship, as a concrete inquiry into concrete matter."[84]

---

[82] Pannenberg, "Response to the Discussion," Theology as History, James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr., eds. New Frontiers in Theology, vol. III (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 232.

[83] See Gordon D. Kaufman, Systematic Theology, p. xiv.

Karl Löwith argues against the possibility of a Christian philosophy of history, but in so doing he goes too far and says that "Christians are not a historical people," because in the Christian tradition the history of salvation has become individualized in the concern for the salvation of each single soul.[85] From the standpoint of historical understanding and a process view of reality, on the contrary, theology must take in all seriousness the legacy of historical consciousness which Christianity has left to the Western world, even though in some of its modern forms it may have become inimical to Christianity. A considerable number of theologians would agree with Van A. Harvey, that today "...nothing less is required than a systematic reappraisal of Christian theology in the light of the historicity of the theologian,"[86] and many would add, the historicity of the material with which the theologian works and of the object of his inquiry.

What would be some of the fundamental elements that would supply a starting point for such a reappraisal? This inquiry will look at some of the consequences that would

---

[84] Raffaello Franchini, "Vico, Historical Methodology, and the Future of Philosophy," Vico: An International Symposium, G. Tagliacozzo, ed., p. 547.

[85] Löwith, Meaning in History, pp. 195-97.

[86] Harvey, op. cit., p. 253.

XUM

follow if theology were to take seriously its relationship to the historian and its work, to the attitude of historical understanding, and to historical events.

1. Theology and the Work of the Historian.

The first point to be made is that theology must respect the specific nature of history, or that the theologian must respect the autonomy of the historian. The rise of historical criticism in the last century and its application to biblical studies and the history of religions put forth data and theories and problems that at times seemed to threaten the validity of religious experience and the legitimacy of Christian theology. The reactions in trying to cope with the new challenge have gone from the extreme of accepting historical criticism uncritically, and in the process of weakening the significance of Jesus and Christian traditions, to the extreme of trying to transcend history completely by looking only to faith as the present, personal call to decision.

One of the most successful attempts in recent years to examine the problem and propose a solution is the work of Van A. Harvey, in the book The Historian and the Believer: A confrontation between the modern historian's principles of judgment and the Christian's will-to-believe. The historian's principles of judgment are given under the rubric of the morality of the historian, and are specified in the following points, which have already been mentioned but still bear repetition now. (i) The radical autonomy of the historian: he cannot let his sources, his witnesses, the judgments, beliefs and opinions of others stand uncriticized, even when they touch upon his own religious traditions or those of others, or upon the original paradigmatic event, such as Jesus Christ for the Christian tradition. (ii) The historian's conclusions must be capable of being communicated to others in such a way that they can be assessed by competent critics. Van Harvey's analysis of historical assessment in terms of data, warrants, backing, conclusion, qualifier, and rebuttal may be somewhat cumbersome, but two concepts should not be overlooked: first, that history as a field of argument encompassing other fields, making use of the conclusions of other disciplines, will use diverse data and reasons for their acceptance; and, secondly, that the assent must often be qualified according to degrees of probability. (iii) The historian needs to exercise sound and balanced judgment: in sorting out the relevant options that may be available for the solution of problems, in recognizing the consensus that may exist in prior work: "...it is not irrelevant to insist that all responsible claims be candid and reasons given for them, reasons commensurate with the degree of assent they solicit from us."[87] (iv) The historian needs to use his present experience, critically interpreted, as the background against which sound judgments

---

[87] Ibid., p. 64.

XUM

are made about the past. This assumes a continuity between the present world of the historian and the world of his witnesses, so that analogies must be used "taken from our present understanding of human nature in order to understand the past."[88] A word of caution may be urged on this point , not recognized by Harvey, namely that the historian should not dismiss too quickly a past event simply because an analogy from the present is not readily available.

Harvey suggests that traditional Christian belief tends to corrupt historical judgment in the sorting out of various options relevant to the solutions of a problem, in the decision as to what is or is not important to argue in any given case, and in the quality of assent solicited or demanded from the reader.

One need not accept all the details of this point of view on the autonomy of the historian in order to support the main thrust of the argument, namely, that theology cannot impose its methodology or dictate its conclusions to historical inquiry. Rather, if the significance of history is to be respected, theology must see itself as a process which begins when history has reached its independent conclusions, which should not be easily dismissed when they appear to be in conflict with previous theological conclusions. This is often done by accusing the historian of being a positivist or by taking refuge in the conviction that only faith enables a person to see the truth of Christian history.

---

[88] Ibid., p. 95.

The truth of Christianity finds its key in the historical person of Jesus, who thus becomes the critical point of contact between theology and history, in such questions as the possibility of attaining the historical Jesus and the connection between the faith of the Christian today and the historical evidence about Jesus. Van A. Harvey examines at length and very competently several of the major theological systems and finds that some divorce faith from history and make the historical Jesus of little significance, and some infringe on the autonomy of the historian by demanding the heaviest assent on types of judgment for which history has the lightest evidence to offer, such as the realities of the existential selfhood of Jesus, or his deep-lying intentions; and others find an answer by practically reducing history to the subjectivity of the historian and to a matter of interpretation. H. Richard Niebuhr, in The Meaning of Revelation, seems to succeed in allowing for both faith and integrity in the historian because he does not plead for a special Christian perspective to justify historical conclusions, but speaks of a Christian insight at another level, namely the level of the significance that one attaches to events which are first known from ordinary historical evidence. The key idea is the distinction between external and internal history, i.e., history as seen from the outside by an observer, and history "apprehended from within," where the events are "items in the destiny of persons and communities; then they belong to a life-time and must be interpreted in a context of persons with their resolutions and devotions."[89] The distinction, however, should not become too rigid, first, because in one way or another Christianity is part of the personal history of most human beings in Western culture, and, secondly, because of the power of self-transcendence which Van A. Harvey wants to recognize in the historian.

The elements of Van A. Harvey's own solution can be summarized as follows: (i) although there are several levels of meaning to the name Jesus, the Jesus known from the memory-impressions and perspective of the disciples corresponds enough to the Jesus that can be recovered by historical means to be reliable: "...we have every reason to believe that the image of his teaching and deeds is a trustworthy one, despite the additions and interpolations and the lack of chronology and significant detail."[90] (ii) Religion is a way of looking at experience and of interpreting certain elemental features of human existence, often in the light of a central event that makes other events meaningful. And "Jesus Christ is the key image in a parable which the Christian uses to interpret the more inclusive reality with which all men are confronted and of which they try to make sense."[91] (iii) Faith is the gift of justification, the righteousness that is established by the gift of God and not by man's efforts, in trust of the graciousness of the ultimate power. This kind of faith can be mediated through a myth as well as history, but for the Christian it is the perspective image of Jesus, in some sense a historical reality, who mediates the answer of faith.

---

[89] H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation (Macmillan Paperbacks, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960), p. 47.

[90] Harvey, op. cit., p. 269.

[91] Ibid., p. 283.

A theologian whose work is dominated by the notion of history is Wolfhart Pannenberg, whose thought has gained considerable fame in recent years. He seems to begin and to develop his theological system on the assumption that "History is reality in its totality."[92] From this premise emerges what might be called a theology of history, although Pannenberg intends it to be much more than that, i.e., a unified theological perspective based on history, or perhaps history itself transformed into a theology. History is constituted by the active presence of God in history and thus becomes the place where God reveals himself.[93] And, further, this revelation of God himself in history becomes the inherent significance or meaning of history. He proposes a reinterpretation of the concept of revelation:

> Revelation is no longer understood in terms of a supernatural disclosure or of a peculiarly religious experience and religious subjectivity, but in terms of the comprehensive whole of reality, which, however is not simply given, but is a temporal process of a history that is not yet completed, but open to a future, which is anticipated in the teaching and personal history of Jesus.[94]

---

[92] Pannenberg, "Redemptive Event and History," in Westermann, ed., op. cit., p. 319.

[93] Pannenberg, "Response to the Discussion," Robinson and Cobb, eds., op. cit., p. 253.

[94] Pannenberg, ed., Revelation as History, David (cont.)

This statement also indicates some other key ideas in Pannenberg. Man's openness to the world and to God requires that he inquire beyond everything in the world and results from his destiny beyond the world. And since "man is by nature historical," what he will be is not given to him by nature but must be sought in history.[95] In the same way that man is open to the future, so is universal history, and its significance must be sought in its conclusion, the end of history which will coincide with the complete self-revelation of God. But the end of history does not remain pure speculation: "in the fate of Jesus, the end of history is experienced in advance as anticipation."[96] The resurrection of Jesus, as a historical event, assumes a key position, and Pannenberg must insist that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is open to anyone who has eyes to see, by means of historical interpretation. The historian, understanding the apocalyptic context of Jesus' life, death and resurrection and relating it to modern man's experience of openness beyond death, should be able to establish not only the fact of the resurrection but even its revelatory significance.

There are several problems in trying to reconcile

Granskou, trans. (Macmillan Paperbacks, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1969), p. ix.

[95] See Pannenberg, What is Man? Contemporary Anthropology in Theological Perspective, Duane A. Priebe, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), pp. 12, 139-40.

[96] Pannenberg, ed., Revelation as History, p. 134.

Pannenberg's theology to the understanding of history presented earlier in this chapter, but they all seem to stem from the fact that Pannenberg asks too much of history and the historian, and attributes to them functions and conclusions that are frankly theological; in Pannenberg it is not so much theology that is historicized but more history that is made into a theology. For example, on the question of faith, it can be said that in Pannenberg

> God's revelation...is grasped not by faith but by historical reason. Faith is the trust in God which is based upon our knowledge of God's revelation. Thus, put very succinctly: We know historically that God has raised Jesus from the dead and has proleptically manifested His divinity in this event, and on the basis of this knowledge we have faith that we too shall share in His Resurrection.[97]

Edmund Dobbin, the author just quoted, suggests that Pannenberg's view of history needs to take into account the limits of history, and compares Pannenberg with Paul Ricoeur, not by way of antithesis but rather qualification. Ricoeur speaks of a universal unity of history as a need and a hope, but not as a speculative claim, because universal-historical projections are not within the competence of the professional historian.[98] A clearer differentiation between the tasks of the theologian and the historian is needed, one that will respect the limits of history and the autonomy of the historian, while recognizing the point where theology begins its work, not in opposition but in continuity with history. Dobbin concludes that "to view the role of the theologian in essential continuity with that of the historian preserves the strength of Pannenberg's position."[99]

---

[97] Edmund J. Dobbin, "Reflections of W. Pannenberg's Revelation Theology," Louvain Studies, IV, 1 (Spring, 1972), p. 22.

[98] See ibid., p. 32. In n. 68 Dobbin states that in a 1971 paper Ricoeur explicitly criticized Pannenberg's concept of universal history.

In reply to some American critics Pannenberg stated: "...my contention is precisely this, that the truth of the Christian message is not separable from the historicality of the relation of our present to primitive Christianity."[100] Not many would challenge this statement in the context of the prevalence of historical consciousness in the contemporary attitude: the faith of a great number of Christians would be severely challenged if historical research were somehow to question the historical existence of Jesus or substantially modify the present image of him. In a certain way Jesus is unique and essential to the Christian tradition and the faith of the individual Christian. But, again, the question of the uniqueness of Jesus should not be made the responsibility of history, except in the sense in which any historical event is singular, individual, and unrepeatable: Jesus must not be made to stand outside of history. The unique significance of Jesus for the Christian community is a matter of theology and faith, and can be expressed by saying that Jesus of Nazareth is "the original relational event of the Christian faith," a center of history that illuminates and gives meaning to the rest, the revelatory moment which makes our past intelligible, or the parable and analogy used in interpreting the present, or a paradigmatic event fusing concreteness and ideals, the particular and the general.[101] In the words of Van A. Harvey: "The distinctive characteristic of religious paradigmatic events... is that these events are believed to focus...into the nature of reality so far as it bears on the human quest for liberation and fulfilment."[102] What is common to all these expressions is that they are interpretative and creative responses by which a historical event is invested or accepted with a unique significance for the present and even for the future.

---

[99] Ibid., p. 35.

[100] Pannenberg, "Response to the Discussion," Robinson and Cobb, eds., op. cit., p. 223.

Can anything more be said about the relationship of Christian faith to historical events in the past? Pannenberg wants to establish that the Christian has historical knowledge of the total event of Jesus Christ, and because he makes no distinction between fact and interpretation but sees event and meaning rising at the same time, faith as a response to what happened in the past is rendered impossible

---

[101] Stevenson, op. cit., p. 136; Kaufman, Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, pp. 106-107; Niebuhr, op. cit., pp. 81, 91; Harvey, op. cit., pp. 257.

[102] Harvey, op. cit., p. 258.

XUM

and faith can only become a trust that the future that appeared in Jesus Christ is open to every man. The present does not receive much attention in Pannenberg. On the other hand Rudolf Bultmann concentrates on the present as the situation of decision: "the meaning of history lies always in the present."[103] It is in this present that man receives his call to decision as well as his freedom as a gift, and the future becomes a responsibility. But the historical past loses its significance: "Jesus Christ is the eschatological event not as an established fact of past time but as repeatedly present, as addressing you and me here and now in the preaching."[104]

A solution, which tries to keep these three dimensions of past, present and future in balance, would need to consider the following attitudes:

(i) The insistence on the present character of faith as a call to decision preserves the notion of the free gift and of the personal encounter with the living God. This is not unlike the situation of the disciples and other contemporaries of Jesus in Judea and Galilee for whom the encounter with Christ often became a call to decision producing different responses. Today a person is still confronted, not in some abstract realm, but in the concrete of his or her history, by a record, a tradition, a memory, an experience of

---

[103] Bultmann, History and Eschatology, p. 155.

[104] *Ibid.*, p. 153.

XUM

faith. The person will respond with acceptance and commitment, or with indifference, or with rejection, or with doubt, or with some other reaction. Acceptance and commitment are shared by a fundamentalist who accepts the record literally and by the existentialist who demythologizes. Two thousand years of history have preserved the record and sustained the traditions and brought them to the present, where they can become occasions for the specific offer of the free gift of faith, whose ultimate grounding perhaps must remain this personal, mostly inarticulate, but trusting experience of the gracious gift of God.

(ii) A second element needs to be the relevance of the past, not only in the originating events but in the continuing history of the Christian community. The present in all its existential immediacy cannot be isolated and divorced from the previous history in all its concrete reality which has made it possible. The Christian is able to say: "Christian history reaches me from across the centuries in word, document, proclamation, persons, communities, and I can make it my own history. I stand at this point as the result of innumerable events and choices through which the past has become available to me in this particular fashion, and I am called to accept the gift that is offered to me in these various forms." Christianity reaches a person through historical mediation: "I am this person with these images just because I have this historical past."[105] The historic

---

[105] Harvey, op. cit., p. 287.

XUM

Christian churches would seem to have the particular task of stressing the role and the importance of the historical community of faith in the mediation of the past to the present of the believer.

(iii) Much of contemporary theology has examined the relationship of Christian faith towards the future, and has defined it as one of responsibility and hope. Johannes B. Metz writes that "the world appears not as a complete and inviolable pre-established harmony, but rather as a becoming reality, which can be transformed through the free historical activity of men into a yet greater future."[106] Faith as trust in the future is called to become "creative hope," which is not an attempt to know the future and rob it of its mystery, or to push aside man's painful experience of alienation and limitation by a naive optimism, but rather puts the Christian "at the service of creative responsibility for the world," even in the awareness of the greatness of the risk.[107]

The notion of creative hope has raised the question of eschatology, an important aspect of the relationship of theology to the discipline of history that can only be mentioned in passing. It has to do with the end of history, already discussed. It would seem that on this subject

---

[106] Metz, "Creative Hope," in New Theology No. 5, Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman, eds. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968), p. 136.

[107] See, *ibid*., p. 141.

Christian theology has something of great value to offer to history, or at least to the historian, namely a way of asking the question of the end of history that suggests the possibility of an ultimate meaning of history to be attained in the future and of a direction for the present of history. But theology cannot impose its eschatological dimension on history and demand that it be accepted as a part of history on historical evidence: theology can only offer it as an interpretation of and an invitation to an act of faith (for even the pattern of promise and fulfillment is a theological interpretation) and to an act of hope in the Lord of history. Paul Ricoeur understands it this way:

> The Christian meaning of history is therefore the hope that secular history is also a part of that meaning which sacred history sets forth, that in the end there is only _one_ history, that all history is ultimately _sacred_. This meaning of history, however, remains an object of faith.[108]

2. Theology and the Framework of Historical Understanding

It seems useful at the beginning of this section to restate that theology is quite distinct from the act and the experience of faith, being rather the process of reflection on faith for the purpose of developing a conceptual content for the sake of understanding and communication. To some Christians the acceptance of historical understanding in the work of theology seems to threaten Christian faith and doctrine. But theology can only deal with the images through which faith is understood, and the development of doctrines in a Christian tradition is a larger process which calls into play the whole community in proclamation, acceptance and interpretation, and not just the theologians. Perhaps this view of the relationship of faith and doctrine to theology already implies the acceptance of the framework of historical understanding. At least it is consistent with it. Stevenson states that historical consciousness, or the myth of history, "arises with its own peculiar set of linguistic images, and there is no closer approach to reality than that which is afforded through these images."[109] And he attributes to Vico this insight into the intimate relationship between history and language, expressed in his theories on the origin of language and the interpretation of myth.

---

[108] Ricoeur, _op. cit._, p. 94.

A theology working within the framework of historical understanding would have to accept fully and honestly the contextual character of all knowing and of reality as known by man in his historical condition. The implications of this demand are too many and too deep to be treated fully here. And several attempts have been made to move in this direction. Only some very basic changes of attitude will be mentioned here.

The theology of the Roman Catholic Church, especially in official pronouncements, is still speaking from the framework of a philosophy of essences and natures. One of the most obvious examples would be the insistence of Pope Paul VI, in the encyclical on the Holy Eucharist _Mysterium Fidei_, that the word "transubstantiation" be retained as the only adequate way of expressing the faith of the Church in the real presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.[110] In the documents of the Second Vatican Council there is often an unresolved ambivalence of attitude and perspective, at times voicing the attitude that certain things are not subject to change, while at the same time expressing an awareness of their historical nature. For example, the _Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation_, paragraph 11, restates the belief of the Church that all the books of the Old and the New Testament "are sacred and canonical because, having been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit they have God for their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself." For this reason these books must be accepted "as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation." But, in the following paragraph, it recognizes that the Scriptures represent a human fashion of communication, and so the meaning intended by the human authors must be discovered by studying the literary forms of the Scripture material, thus recognizing and accepting the work of biblical criticism.

---

[109] Stevenson, op. cit., p. 6.

---

[110] Paul VI, "Mysterium Fidei," _Acta Apostolicae Sedis_, LVII, 11 (Oct. 1965), pp. 755, 766-769.

Historical understanding would require that all forms and systems of human thought, and all uses of language, be they philosophical or theological, from the piety of the faithful or from the official teaching authority of a Christian tradition, be recognized as historical and contextual. This would mean that not only must formulas of belief and doctrinal formulations be understood in the historical context in which they arose, but also that they may be less than adequate for a different historical context, and must remain open to change, because they are dated and finite and can always be surpassed.

What has just been said about modes of thought and doctrinal formulas, also must be said about institutions, to the extent that they are part of history. Christian institutions do not escape the condition of historicity, and this is applicable not only to particular structures but also to the Church itself as an institution. Richard P. McBrien has examined this question and spelled out the consequences in an admirably intelligent presentation. He uses a familiar typology when he speaks of the Ptolemaic Church, and calls for the Church to experience a Copernican revolution so that it can move to an Einsteinian situation. The Ptolemaic ecclesiology dominated Roman Catholic theology from the Reformation to the Second Vatican Council. This view makes the Church the center of history, and it absolutizes the institution by identifying the Church with the Kingdom of God and making it the ordinary means of salvation for all mankind.[111] McBrien discovers in the documents of Vatican II the same ambivalence of attitude on the subject of the Church that was discussed in the preceding paragraph in reference to scripture. He points to paragraphs 13 and 14 of the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, and to paragraph 3 of the *Decree on Ecumenism* as texts that "seem to endorse unequivocally the Ptolemaic point of view."[112] And he makes reference to other passages, especially in the *Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*, which, although not unequivocally in the Ptolemaic perspective, could be so interpreted by theologians with that frame of mind. But if the council failed to break completely with the Ptolemaic perspective, at the same time it did advance the understanding of the Church "beyond the uncritical notion that the Church is a visible, hierarchically structured organization which exists to save people by bringing as many men and women as possible within its orbit."[113] According to McBrien,

> The starting point of the ecclesiology of Vatican II is strikingly different. The Church is a *mystery* before it is an institution or an organization. It is a mystery because it is the presence of the merciful Lord among men. Therefore, it is a mystery even in its institutional and juridical structure. The Church is also the *sacrament* of Christ, the visible presence of Christ in the world. And it is a *pilgrim community*, or the People of God with a mission within as well as

---

[111] McBrien, *Do We Need the Church?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), pp. 104-105.

[112] *Ibid.*, p. 153.

[113] *Ibid.*, p. 151.

> beyond the confines of history. Indeed, the Church cannot be viewed apart from history.[114]

The Copernican revolution advocated by McBrien would insist that the Church must be seen as subordinated to the Kingdom of God. It is to the Kingdom that all men are called, and not to membership in the Church, and the Kingdom is the ordinary means of salvation, not the Church. The function of the Church is to proclaim the Kingdom of God, to spend itself in the service of the world and the realization of the Kingdom, and to embody the meaning of the Kingdom by the character and quality of its communal life. Membership in the Church can only be grounded in the mystery of election, which is not to privilege but to responsibility. The Kingdom of God is the only theological absolute.[115] And the Kingdom is open to anyone who does the will of the Father that "we should love one another as God himself has loved us in Christ."[116] The Einsteinian revolution in the concept of the Church is not easily identified because it remains an unfinished business and because it resists all attempts to impose clearly definable principles and distinctions. It would involve such elements as the acceptance of relativity and change: the Church's position in history is relative to the Kingdom and to the world, and change is inevitable and unpredictable, and will not be purely external.[117]

---

[114] *Ibid.*, p. 121.

[115] *Ibid.*, pp. 76, 15, 171-73. The Kingdom as a "theological absolute" is related to McBrien's view that the Kingdom of God is "the ground and goal of history." The absolute character would be seen in the aspect of its transcendence of history.

[116] *Ibid.*, p. 196.

> Something entirely new will come out of the cauldron, and the only similarity it must bear with the primitive Church of the New Testament is that it must be a community which explicitly acknowledges that Jesus of Nazareth is the meaning of all life and history and which dedicates itself, without qualification, to the task of building and sustaining the human community.[118]

This brief presentation does not do justice to the power and cogency of McBrien's thought, but it is hoped that it will be sufficient to show the conclusions that are reached when the consequences of historical understanding are accepted, even though McBrien uses a typology taken from the history of science.

In a more general way another author states the same idea when he writes: "...all that the church has done and thought must be incessantly reinvestigated on the assumption that it is only relatively a vehicle of truth."[119] And this raises the question of relativity as a major component of historical understanding.

First, relativity implies relatedness. In McBrien's discussion, when the Church is denied an absolute position as the center of history, it is not in order to reduce it to

---

[117] Ibid., pp. 77, 227, 76.

[118] Ibid., p. 206.

[119] Elwyn A. Smith, "The Historicity of God," The Journal of Religion, XLIII, 1 (Jan., 1963), p. 31.

XUM

insignificance and emptiness of meaning but in order to see it in its relationship to other realities, namely the Kingdom of God and the historical world. When theology, in the framework of historical consciousness, is seen as relative, it is again a question of a position of mutual relationship to other realities such as the actual experience of faith of an individual or a community, the on-going process of historical change, and above all the mystery of ultimate reality that cannot be captured by human formulas or reduced to human words.

Secondly, to accept the phenomenon of relativity as an integral part of one's way of thinking does not mean that one finds himself in the midst of change with no point on which to stand, as if lost in the middle of the ocean with nothing to hang on to. Relativity implies that no idea, and especially no verbal formula, has such absolute validity that it can never be called into question; it does not mean that all principles and all convictions must be challenged and questioned at every moment. In a normal process while a particular point is being probed and investigated the rest of the body of knowledge forms the horizon within which the questioning may take place and against which the new conclusions may be tested. Or one may return to the notion of "functional absolutes," about which Gordon D. Kaufman says: "Our willingness constantly to use them in the pursuit of truth, to criticize them in the name of truth, and finally to stake our existence on them implies a faith that they are somehow rooted in what is ultimately real, beyond all illusion."[120] This ought to be particularly true of the Christian believer, since the question of relativity does not invalidate his experience of faith, but only renders its expression more problematic.

Thirdly, the relativity of knowledge does not mean that there are no criteria by which to judge what may or may not be accepted as true at a particular moment. It does mean that, for example, the interpretation of the experience of faith and its history in the Judeo-Christian traditions, "can never be more or other than the understanding which we have in our situation in history with our experience of the world as mediated to us through our aptitudes and biases and intellect."[121] Kaufman sees two fundamental norms for theological work: an experiential norm, i.e., that theology must be able to make sense of the present experience, and a historical norm, i.e., that theology must maintain a basic continuity with the Christian experience and communities of the past. "Theology is thus the continuous attempt to understand our present in terms of the revelatory event in the past, and to appropriate this past from our present situation."[122] And in so doing the theologian is subject to the controls of authority, just as the historian is: the authority of the Christian community and of other theologians, just as the historian is responsible to the community of historians; the authority of the documents or primary sources, which for the theologian is the Bible and the experience of primitive Christianity; and the authority of one's personal conviction, since neither the theologian nor the historian can accept a claim to truth second hand.[123]

---

[120] Kaufman, Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, p. 86.

[121] Kaufman, Systematic Theology, p. 74.

[122] Ibid., p. 76.

It would seem that the acceptance of a relative stance in theology is not asking the person to do anything more than to accept the normal conditions under which human life unfolds, conditions of ambiguity and uncertainty, of a pluralism of options, and of the need of making decisions and committing oneself on probabilities and finally on trust.

Finally, some observations on another characteristic of historical understanding as it relates to theology, namely, the understanding of history as the realm of freedom and creativity. Paul Ricoeur has a beautiful statement: "...what should happen...if we should see the image of God... as the striking power of human creativity; if we treat it not as the residual trace of a craftsman who has abandoned his work to the ravages of time, but as a continuous act in the creative movement of history and duration?"[124] The

---

[123] Ibid., pp. 67-70.

[124] Ricoeur, op. cit., p. 110.

XUM

categories of creativity and freedom would seem to demand of theology the careful consideration of two concerns at least, among many others: first, the most explicit recognition and respect, along with a strenuous defense of the freedom of individuals and communities both within a Christian Church as well as outside of it; secondly, a continuing examination and an insistent proclamation of the responsibility of the Christian for the world and for the history in which he lives now and which is coming in the future. The theme of responsibility has been prominent in theology since World War II, beginning with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, continuing in the theology of secularization, and in the theology of hope, and most recently in the theology of liberation. The categories of creativity and freedom bring the future as a dimension of history more clearly into focus: the future serves as a limit to the present, because by remaining open and always "not-yet" it prevents the present from accepting itself as finished and final; and as a stimulus, for "an ethic driven by 'hope for the future' can stimulate the courage to alter the world, to change the course of history, and to seek the future of the kingdom of freedom and justice."[125] These themes have found a responsive chord in the mind of modern man, both Christian and non-Christian as seen, for example, by their prominence in the Marxist-Christian dialogue.

---

[125] Carl E. Braaten, "Toward a Theology of Hope," New Theology No.5, p. 107.

3. Theology and the Revelatory Significance of Historical Events.

Just as no serious theologian, even in the Roman Catholic tradition, would continue to define faith as an intellectual assent given to revealed truths, no one would define revelation as the communication of truths necessary for salvation. The theology of revelation has stressed that revelation means self-disclosure, God revealing himself, rather than truths about himself, and that revelation is a continuing, present, reality. Richard P. McBrien describes revelation as "a personal union in knowledge between God and a human person in the context of an historical community."[126] In this definition the historical dimension of faith and revelation is recognized in the role of the community. Other theologians have seen the relationship of history and revelation in more intrinsic and necessary terms. Pannenberg, for example, writes:

> Only because the infinite reality, which as personal can be called God, is present and active in the history of the finite, can one speak of a revelation of God in history. For it is thereby concretely shown that the finite is not left to itself. Hence it is misleading to say that history reveals God. For history is not a subject which subsists independently over against God. In its very idea, history is constituted by the active presence of the infinite God, and therefore one can only say that God reveals himself in history.[127]

It is inescapable that any theological perspective

---

[126] McBrien, op. cit., p. 193.

[127] Pannenberg, "Response to the Discussion," Robinson and Cobb, eds., op. cit., p. 253.

XUM

taking seriously the historical consciousness of man must look for the revelatory act or presence of God in history, and in fact many theologians either proceed on the assumption that God reveals himself in history or attempt to establish it. But it would seem that some concentrate on the historicity of the present moment, and others on the historicity of the revelatory event of Jesus Christ, while the rest of history, the concrete unfolding of man's existence and institutions through the centuries is either ignored or given a passing nod only.

Karl Rahner, for example, speaks of "the human historicity of a possible revelation."[128] But the focal point is man, man who is historical because he acts in a freedom originating in his transcendence with respect to the absolute: man is historicity, while nature only has variations, because of the uniqueness and unpredictability of freedom. Man as spirit, then, is fundamentally oriented towards history. But revelation also is the free act of God, and it remains the unexpected thing, capable of discovery, taking place where it may be received, i.e., in the openness of the human being. This free, historical revelation may have taken place only in the life of special individuals, and in this sense it may have a reference to human history, rather than historicity, and to historical memory, because man is not just his own history, but also part of the history of humanity. But the connection between man in the present and a past event may have to be sought in some kind of human-historical simultaneity, perhaps in a living tradition.

---

[128] Rahner, Hearers of the Word, revised by J.B. Metz, Michael Richards, trans. (Montreal: Palm Publishers, 1969), p. 150.

> ...man is the existent thing, possessing a spirituality that is receptive and open to history, who stands in freedom and as freedom before the God of a possible revelation which, if it occurs, appears in his history (as the supreme actualization of that history) _in the word_. Man is the one who _listens in his history for the word_ of the free God.[129]

Although in later writings Rahner seems to allow more room for history,[130] here at least the process character of history as events is missing, and God reveals himself in history simply because historicity is integral to man to the extent that he is not to be found without it.

Wolfhart Pannenberg also begins with an understanding of man as openness to the world and, beyond the world, to God, an openness that reaches even beyond death because man continues to ask questions beyond every experience and given situation, beyond even his own constructs of culture. Concretely this openness manifests itself in the experience of change in the life of the individual and of groups, and this

---

[129] _Ibid._, p. 162.

[130] See, eg., "History of the World and Salvation History," _Theological Investigations_, vol. V, _Later Writings_, Karl-H. Kruger, trans. (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), pp. 97-114; p. 99, "Salvation-history, which of its nature is a hidden history, works itself out in the dimensions of profane history in which it takes place." p. 100, "...the same man who in his whole and entire being is faced with the decision regarding salvation in his historical existence has ultimately only one history..."

XUM

takes place in history. And man first became aware of his historicity and the historical character of reality when God began to deal with man out of historical events, rather than only through natural events. This is the Old Testament experience, and Pannenberg follows Gerhard von Rad's thesis that in the Old Testament theology is ultimately an interpretation of history. In 1961 Pannenberg edited a book by the title of Offenbarung Als Geschichte.[131] The concept of revelation for ancient Israel and for primitive Christianity is examined by Rolf Rendtorff and by Ulrich Wilkens, respectively, and on this scriptural basis Pannenberg develops some dogmatic theses on the doctrine of revelation. This is the picture that emerges: Israel's first reflection was to look at the past and to see its past history as the actions of God that established it as a nation; the prophets, while not overlooking the past, directed the people's consideration towards the future, both as Yahweh's response to the decisions of Israel in history and as the time for the fulfillment of his promises of definitive salvation and the revelation of his glory to all the nations; the prophets of the exile stress the future dimension, and in apocalyptic literature the definitive salvation becomes a cosmic event, calling for the end of history and the final revelation of God's power and glory. The context of the life of Jesus is dominated by the apocalyptic view of history, and this background becomes crucial in

---

[131] Pannenberg, ed., Revelation as History.

XUM

Pannenberg's understanding of Jesus: Jesus proclaimed the imminence of the kingdom of God which, in that particular context, would conjure up images of the *eschaton*; Jesus also proclaimed an intimate relationship between himself and the kingdom, in the sense that the people's response to him and to his preaching would determine their participation in the imminent kingdom; Jesus' death appeared as a denial of his claim and of his mission, but his resurrection became the self-vindication of God and his self-revelation as he who has powers over all things, even over death, and therefore is the Lord of history; but the resurrection is also the appearance of the *eschaton*, in a totally unexpected way, because there had been no hint that it would first appear in one person alone; in Jesus the end of history has appeared proleptically and so has the full revelation of God's glory: this is true in and for Christ only, at this time, while for the rest of mankind it remains available only in faith and hope. The image of man as open to the world and to God even beyond death forms the framework within which modern man can understand the eschatological conceptions without which primitive Christian faith would be incomprehensible and contemporary Christian faith groundless.[132] God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ is direct, that is to say, the medium of revelation cannot be thought of as being distinct from God himself: "The creaturely medium of revelation, the man Jesus Christ, is caught up to God in his distinctiveness and received in unity with God himself."[133] There are other manifestations of God which do not involve the disclosure of his essence, as the power over all things, and these should be kept distinct from self-revelation, which is the resurrection of Jesus, defended as historical and made the pivotal point of Pannenberg's system of thought.

---

[132] For a summary of Pannenberg's thought and its development, see James M. Robinson, "Revelation as Word and as History," in *Theology as History*, Robinson and Cobb, eds., especially pp. 26-42.

> If the fate of Jesus Christ is the anticipation of the end, and thus the revelation of God, then no further revelation of God can happen. Of course, God is active even in the events after Christ, and he also discloses himself in that time, but not in any fundamentally new way, but rather as the one who has already been revealed in the fate of Jesus. This does not mean that nothing new happens after Christ. The history after Christ bears his mark. Its special motifs seem to become noticeable for the first time in the thrust that is contained in the Christ event. The history after Christ is determined in essence by the proclamation of the revelation in Christ. In the effects of this proclamation, new facts are created in the history of the world.[134]

There is little doubt that Pannenberg and his circle have proposed the most comprehensive and systematic view of theology as history in the present time. The objection that Pannenberg's system demands too much of history and the historian has already been discussed. The question to be raised here concerns all the other happenings of history besides the event of Jesus Christ: do they have any revelatory significance? even though they may not be direct self-revelations of God can they be manifestations of the continuing presence of God in history that can illuminate and help to understand both the self-revelation in Jesus Christ and the new situations that constantly challenge man, in his memory of history and in his making of history?

---

[133] Pannenberg, ed., Revelation as History, p. 5.

[134] Ibid., p. 144.

In reply to an essay by Pannenberg, Martin J. Buss makes the following statement: "In Israel, God was pictured as dealing with and in history. This means that God's enemies are not primarily mythical powers but are human forces, both within and outside of the elect people."[135] Gordon D. Kaufman makes the point that theology must be willing and ready to examine political and economic situations, scientific and philosophical developments, and every aspect of human life, under the revelatory light.[136] For Schubert M. Ogden, while no action of ordinary human beings can be identified simply as the action of God, every creature is to a certain extent God's act, because each is partly a reflection of God's free decision, and just as for human persons certain actions give peculiarly apt expression to what they are, so for God certain events are his actions in a special sense of the word.[137] And Elwyn A. Smith writes: "Christian history is pervaded by the thought that God not only has involved himself in the

---

[135] Martin J. Buss, "The Meaning of History," Theology as History, Robinson and Cobb, eds., p. 144.

[136] Kaufman, Systematic Theology, p. 73.

[137] Ogden, "What Sense Does it Make to Say, 'God Acts in History'?" The Journal of Religion, XLIII, 1 (Jan., 1963), pp. 13-15.

XUM

situation of man by means of an incarnation but that he remains permanently identified with history in a manner as concrete to the present as his incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth was to the past."[138]

None of these statements answer exactly the question of the revelatory significance of historical events of the past, but they seem at least to imply an affirmative response. There seems to be no grounds for saying that God stopped dealing with human forces with and in history after the resurrection of Jesus; and if theology must examine the political and economic developments in the present, an examination of the same developments in the past may be less ambiguous from a distance in time. And if certain actions are in a special way expressive of God's presence, and if he remains permanently identified with history, this ought to apply not only to the present but also to the process of history from the incarnation to the present. The point to be made here is that if theology, or a certain theological perspective at least, works on the assumption that God reveals himself in history, theology must examine seriously the whole of history for "manifestations" of God's presence and revelatory signs. Nor can history be limited to the history of Western civilization.

This attitude and methodological suggestion would seem to be the logical extension of Vico's work in the relationship

---

[138] Elwyn A. Smith, "The Historicity of God," loc. cit., p. 22.

XUM

of philosophy and philology. The canon for the interpretation of Vico suggested in this study is, negatively, not to turn Vico either into a philosopher or into a historian to the exclusion of the other, and, positively, to retain the balance between philosophy and history which seemed to be Vico's main concern. Vico did not turn his back on natural science in his search for a philosophy of man only to run into another inscrutable mystery dominated by fate or the arbitrary will of God. Rather, he moved to history so that in its data and through its methodology he could discover philosophical truths in what men have done, that truth that for him had solidified in facts, facts that are in reality truths to be displayed again. He breaks from the metaphysical traditions of his time that had ecstatically contemplated God from the natural order of things. He sets aside the theology of his time, based on natural metaphysics and scriptural revelation, and trying to establish the congruency of natural and supernatural.

> The Scienza nuova is the search for another order, the human order: an order that is not foreign to God (who is regarded as the condition of every ordering, or rather order itself in its ideality) but is attained by men in the safety of their civil humanity. Order: not chaos and not cosmos: human historical order. Order developed in human ways, not a given situation to be accepted or contemplated. For Vico history is a continuous ordering of human life, in a complex totality of actions that go beyond their particularity. And all the civilizations that are unaware of their very delicate systems of daily, spontaneous, concrete responsibilities, to be accomplished not for the sake of declaiming one's own virtuous morality, but out of the obligation of a solidarity that cannot be renounced, face the penalty of falling into new inhuman disorders

and the threat of renewed barbarism.[139]

Vico set aside, for all practical purposes, Judeo-Christian history because he wanted to exclude the extraordinary, miraculous intervention of God in the activity of men, and he was unable to find a way to deal with this unique, radically different presence of God in history, that was proclaimed in Scripture, according to the interpretation of his time. But he did not exclude God from the history of civilization; on the contrary, he discovered God acting with man.

The three elements postulated by Vico at the beginning of civilization, religion, marriage, and burials, are occasioned by natural occurrences, such as thunder and lightning, but they become a religious experience, as well as the originating event of civilization, because there is in the heart of men a need and a tendency that in their fear makes them turn to God: "man, fallen in despair of all the helps to be found in nature, desires something greater with the power to save him. But superior to nature is God, and this is the light that God has spread over men."[140]

As he continues to investigate the growth of civilization, Vico keeps meeting the active presence of God: human beings keep striving for limited goals of personal gain and safety, but their choices keep turning into something greater

---

[139] Pietro Piovani, "Vico e la filosofia senza natura," Campanella e Vico (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1969), pp. 265-66.

[140] Vico, Scienza nuova III (1744), #339. See also #333.

XUM

and unforeseen, a new level of human life: the wild giants drag each a woman into a cave because of their fear and lust, but this becomes the beginning of families; and the head of the families want to bind to themselves their feudal serfs, by tying them to the land, and this becomes the origin of cities; and so on, step by step. It is not the details that are important, but the conclusion, that this process is the work of the providence of God.[141] History presented Vico with the evidence, for example, that while the patricians used law with the intent of subjecting the plebeians to their authority, in so doing they established the principle of rights and the system of law which lead to democratic forms of government. Of this evidence Vico asked the question: what power is at work here? Is it fate or chance? or is it God? Vico unequivocally answers: God, and this is an interpretation coming from the data of faith in his own personal history. But to choose any of the other alternatives would also be a stance of faith. More to the point, Vico's theological conclusions arise from a critical study of the data of history.

To return once more to Vico's principle of the *verum-factum*, the first result of its application to history is the discovery of a philosophy of man that emphasizes the creativity and freedom of the human mind, on the evidence of its activity in history both in spontaneity and reflection.

---

[141] See, e.g., *ibid.*, #1108.

The second result for Vico was to discover that the factum of history is not exclusively of man, but that it includes somehow the factum of God, what God has done with the activity of man, and the factum of God opens up the possibility of discovering the verum of God. The truth of God does not reveal directly what God is in himself, only what God has done and what God intends in his relationship with man, as well as his power over history.[142]

On this basis, Vico's suggestion to theology today would be to approach history, the history of the historians, with the explicit intention of working out in it not just a history of theology or a theology of history, but a search for an understanding of the experience of faith wherever the encounter of God with man takes place, in special individuals and special events, where his presence may be more clearly manifest.

This use of history for theology is already done implicitly in many ways. Richard P. McBrien, for example, sees revelation as a here-and-now reality, because God speaks in the present to the world and to the Christian "in and through the neighbor who cares."[143] And then he takes a historical figure, Pope John XXIII, as an example of this present revelation:

> More meaningful even than Paul for our time is Pope John XXIII. He provides us with a kind of test case

---

[142] In Pannenberg's system God's power over history is his essence.

[143] McBrien, op. cit., p. 196.

> for this new theology of revelation. God revealed himself through John's spirit of warmth and love, his openness to all peoples, of every race, nation, and religious belief and unbelief; through his concern for the humble and the neglected, for the 'castoffs' of society; through his spirit of resignation and nobility in the face of suffering and death; through his concern for justice, so forcefully expressed in his encyclical *Mater et Magistra*; through his concern for world peace, for harmony and friendship among all peoples, as expressed in *Pacem in Terris*; through his concern for Church unity and Christian renewal. It is as if God were calling us to these tasks through the word and ministry of John.[144]

He continues by describing how people responded to Pope John, and concludes that the power and strength of this figure came from the fact that he was so clearly 'a man for others,' "a gracious neighbor, a suffering servant of God--without pretension, without self-seeking, without arrogant concern for dignity and rank."[145] Working in and through him was the one who is the paradigm of the "man for others" in the Christian tradition. Is this not saying that Pope John was a special moment in the continuing historical revelation of God? Is it only "as if God were calling us" in him? Perhaps nothing new is added to the Christ event, but it is a new historical call in that moment of history.

Another example might be taken from the history of the Roman Catholic Church in America. Historians are well aware of the effect that the experience of religious liberty in the United States of America had on the attitudes and the thinking of the Church in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Research could show that this historical experience eventually led to a theological statement on religious liberty, in the Second Vatican Council. If the historical experience of the Roman Catholic Church in the U.S.A. were to be interpreted theologically as a manifestation of God's concern for man's freedom, it could lead to new attitudes of respect and defense of this freedom both within and outside the Church, far beyond the present understanding.

---

[144] *Ibid.*, pp. 196-97.

[145] *Ibid.*, p. 197.

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter was not to defend or attack the orthodoxy of Vico from contemporary theological standpoints, but to see if there are any affinities between Vico's thought and some of the theological work being done today. The starting point was the climate of historical thinking which, together with scientific developments, dominates the world-view of modern man and, therefore, will deeply affect theological thinking as well. Vico has been proclaimed by many, even those who know his work only second or third hand, as the first thinker to approach the historicity of man in a conscious way. If this is so, it is to be expected that Vico's thought would have the most logical and most coherent relationship with those theological authors who work consciously and explicitly with the perspective that can be broadly described as historical consciousness or historical understanding.

Before dealing with the theological issues, the question of history was explored, on three different levels, i.e., history as discipline, philosophy of history, and the fundamental intellectual horizon or framework of historical understanding. The discipline of history is the study of man's past, seeking knowledge and understanding of the activities, the lights and the shadows, the glories and the infamies, the destructions and the creations of man's presence in space and time. Since the historian is a man in history, the continuity with the human past enables him to understand what man has done, but the element of subjectivity also limits the study of history: there is no way that any man can stand outside of history in order to study it purely as an object. If this eliminates the possibility of absolute certainty in historical knowledge, it does not invalidate it; it merely points out its character of being an assessment of probabilities in the presence of ambiguities. And there are methodological principles and procedures that are tools both in the searching for the clues and in the assessment of the conclusions.

The questions of the possibility of universal history, of unity and direction to the process of history, of an end and goal to the whole of history, lead to the area of the philosophy of history, and this is the domain of philosophy. While the historian by and large today would say that the answers to these problems are not within the competence of historical study, some philosophers would attempt to discover the key to the meaning of history, either within history or outside of it. Karl Löwith would insist that the key is to be found either in the place of man in the cosmos or in the eschatological concept of the end of history. Hegel interprets history as the Absolute Spirit coming to presence to itself in the dialectical movement of history. For Marx history is the domain of homo faber and is determined by economic conditions and the dialectic of the control of the forces of production, and the alienation of the subject from the object of his work, the product itself. Finally, another way of interpreting history is that of the theology of history, as in Saint Augustine, where the controlling principles are in the plan and the action of God in respect to human history.

Historical understanding is a viewpoint that affects every aspect of thought and reflection and leads to a new way of looking at reality. It looks to history as a source of understanding and forms of thought that might be generalized to illuminate man's knowledge of himself, his activity, and the horizon of ultimate reality. W. Taylor Stevenson has expressed this concept by naming history the myth of modern man, namely, the image that tells the true story about original events and man's encounters with ultimate reality. Historical understanding in this chapter is taken to mean a way of knowing and understanding through which man can deal with his own reality, with the natural world around him and with the ever recurring questions about what is ultimately real. Historical understanding makes no pretense to be able to grasp ultimate reality, it merely supplies some images and concepts through which man today can make sense of some of the basic questions of his life. Historical understanding works through categories such as contextuality, relatedness and relativity, freedom and decision, creativity and novelty. The very nature of historical understanding would be destroyed if it were allowed to become rigid, exclusive, and dogmatic.

If these are the functions of history and historical thinking in the contemporary world, where does theology stand? First, it must respect the autonomy of the historian. Van A. Harvey speaks of it in terms of the morality of the historian which the theologian must not violate, by asking history either to compromise on its own principles or to do what it cannot do, such as justify the act of faith. For example, Wolfhart Pannenberg, a theologian for whom history is a central concern, seems to ask too much of history, both in his approach to the historicity of the resurrection and in the attitude that the revelatory meaning of history is open to the historian as historian. Secondly, the question of faith and history must somehow keep the following elements in perspective: Christian faith is essentially connected with a historical originating event; the event of Jesus Christ is mediated to each individual through the history of a community and through each person's own history; and a theology of faith can never forget that faith is a free gift of God in the mystery of election to special responsibility. Thirdly, theology can suggest an eschatological dimension and an attitude of hope to the question of the final meaning of history, but it must offer these concepts as the products not of history but of faith and of reflection upon the faith experience.

Another way of looking at the relationship of history and theology is to ask what happens to theology when the theologian accepts historical understanding as his intellectual frame of reference. It was suggested that such a theology must be willing to accept the contextuality and relativity of its own work and of the institutional structures of its tradition. In this context Richard P. McBrien calls for a revolution of thought in the Roman Catholic Church that will abandon completely the Ptolemaic view of the Church as the center of history, and move towards a Copernican view of the Church as subordinate to the Kingdom of God, as its proclamation, its servant, its sign; eventually it would need to reach an Einsteinian situation of relativity and change. Theology, from the perspective of historical understanding, would also stress man's responsibility for the present and the future of history, as do the recent movements of the theology of hope and the theology of liberation.

Finally, it was suggested that there may be a need for theology to reflect on persons and events throughout the entire, continuing process of history. If the assumption that God has revealed himself in history in the past and continues to do so even to the present is correct, then the understanding and the communication of the experience of faith, which is the function of theology, can be enriched by theological interpretations of historical events and persons, however tentative these may have to remain.

Vico's relationship to the whole question of history should be clear by now: he reasserted the possibility and the validity of historical work in the face of its neglect by the mathematical and scientific approach to knowledge of his time. While some interpreters would describe Vico as the first of the philosophers of history, this study has contended that this way of understanding Vico is too narrow and limited, since Vico was not trying to find the universal laws of history or its ultimate meaning as a unity (although there are some of these elements present in the *Scienza nuova*). Vico was, rather, searching history for the meaning of man and man's reality: he would seem to be more at home in the perspective of historical consciousness, because of his insistence that the nature of things is their coming into being at certain times and in certain fashions, because of his approach to language and myth. This is the interpretation of W. Taylor Stevenson, for example. And just as after many long years of reflection Vico arrived at a way of thinking and understanding based in the concrete of history (without overlooking the ambiguities and contradictions of his thought), so his thought would find itself at home in the theological expressions that look to the concrete of history for their starting point. Vico might even have a suggestion in this direction: he bracketed and tried to set aside sacred history because he wanted to learn about man himself, without the extraordinary and the miraculous intervention of God always threatening to invalidate his discoveries, but at the same time he discovered that the *factum* of man always involves also the action, the *factum* of God, and so in his search for the *verum* of man he also discovered the *verum* of God, which was often also confirmed by the special history of the people of Israel.

Bruce Mazlish writes:

> What was new in Vico was his insistence that the workings of providence must be explained in reference to *secondary* causes and exemplifed in terms of the *empirical data*. This was the revolutionary turning *around of* the question: a Copernican revolution in theodicy, wherein providence does not explain the whirling of events, but the events explain the workings of providence.[146]

And this point of view, leaving aside the question of orthodoxy, is also the reason that Vico seems to have profound affinities for those theological efforts that proceed from an empirical and historical starting point.

W. Taylor Stevenson, in the concluding chapter of his book on history as myth, states:

> If reality is understood as being historical in nature, and we are not to conceive of God as existing

---

[146] Mazlish, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

> somehow apart from the historical reality of our world, but as being in the closest relation to it, then we will affirm that God is to be understood as historical in nature. God brings reality into being, and what he brings into being is history, and we only know God through what he has made: history. "The true and the made are convertible."[147]

The question of God will be the subject of the next chapter.

---

[147] Stevenson, op. cit., p. 147.

Chapter V

Vico and Contemporary Theology: The Question of God

Introduction

The most important theological question to arise from Vico's historical perspective concerns the concept of God: how will theology speak of a God whose abstract being (verum) must be discovered in his historical activity (factum)? What kind of a concept of God will emerge from a theological perspective that will accept the categories of historical understanding as applicable even in a discussion of ultimate reality? This final chapter is an effort to answer these questions in a constructive manner and to suggest a concept of God that begins with Vico's historical attitude, incorporates some of the contemporary theological notions of God consistent with historical understanding, and concludes with the Christian assertion of the particular historical presence of God in Jesus of Nazareth.

Vico's God is a provident God continuously at work with man in the unfolding of history. The ambiguity in Vico's expression of his ideas has resulted in the persistent debate over the immanence versus the transcendence of God, especially in the *Scienza nuova*. Some attempts have been made to resolve this ambiguity by reducing Vico's thought to one pole or the other, to pantheism or to the classical concept of God as the first cause and the unmoved mover. For example, for Benedetto Croce, the Scienza nuova demands the full acceptance of an immanent notion of providence: Vico conceived this notion and introduced it in his work, but was not able to follow it through to its logical conclusions, because his faith stopped him, and the philosopher was overcome by the believer, when confronted by the vision of a totally immanent process of development containing within itself its own reasons for being and its own power of creativity.[1] For Franco Amerio Vico's God is a transcendent God: if Vico says that God is all in all, that God is everything and everything is God, he is only using the principle of eminent attribution; if there is a development in Vico's thought it is only towards a consideration of the more dynamic aspect of God's activity as providence in history, where history becomes the revelation of God's wisdom and love, and providence becomes the criterion for the resolution and the explanation of the mysteries of human history.[2]

In the last twenty-five years scholars have tended more and more towards the acceptance of both immanence and transcendence in Vico's God, without trying to resolve the problems of coherence and consistency thus encountered. The purpose of this chapter is to suggest that the contradictions present in Vico's thought may be resolved by using a concept of God that was not available to Vico, namely, the concept of a God both immanent and transcendent, absolute and relative, eternal and temporal, as developed explicitly and systematically in the twentieth century by some philosophers and theologians. There is no intention here of implying in any way whatsoever that this concept of God is to be found in Vico's works, not even in the most veiled or inchoate form. Vico's God simply *is* transcendent, absolute, eternal and *acts* immanently, as part of his creation. The point to be made is, rather, that the concept of God as developed by some forms of process thought is a stage beyond Vico's position, but one that is consistent with his historical perspective. It might even be said that this concept of God is the logical answer to the questions raised by Vico's view of man as a creative agent in history. If this view is correct, it will suggest a new approach to the question of Vico's theological orthodoxy. In the past this question was examined mainly from the standpoint of the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition considered as the norm by which to judge Vico's work. Today, even in Roman Catholic theological circles, the validity of one philosophical system normative for theological thinking and given a privileged position in the interpretation of Christian experience is seriously questioned and often rejected. In this new climate of thought Vico's relationship to theology can be seen in a new light: having understood the historical nature of man and the significance of history for human understanding in a manner that makes him a pioneer of the contemporary sense of history, Vico would find himself in sympathy with those theological expressions that understand God also as in some way historical. If Vico's thought is the first philosophical statement of historical understanding, it seems only fitting that his thought be completed and made more consistent by a contemporary theological view that accepts this understanding in all its implications, even in its understanding of God.

---

[1] See Croce, La filosofia di Giambattista Vico, pp. 133-34.

[2] See Amerio, Introduzione allo studio di G. B. Vico, pp. 244, 248.

In the second paragraph of the Scienza nuova (1744) Vico states that the action of divine providence in the development of human civilization is one of the principal themes of the work, and this makes it a "civil, reasoned theology." By civil Vico wants to say that he takes a historical approach, looking in history for his data, rather than in the natural sciences or in the pure abstractions of philosophical thought. But it is reasoned theology, namely, it depends on intellectual examination of the data, together with philosophical reflection and rational articulation of the conclusions. Thus he differentiates himself clearly both from a theodicy based on a particular view of the physical world as well as from one developed by reason alone, and he distances himself both from the God of the Scholae as well as from the God of Descartes. He wants to contemplate God from a study of the social and civil nature of man. In an effort to follow Vico's methodology, the first part of the chapter will examine some attempts at a formulation of a historical concept of God. The second part will search for more precision and coherence in a philosophical, metaphysical description of God. And the third part will try to say that the Christian assertion of a God in history includes the historical person of Jesus.

I. God in History: A Cultural-Historical Approach

The previous chapter ended with a quotation from W. Taylor Stevenson declaring that God "is to be understood as historical in nature."[3] His reasons for this affirmation are that reality is understood as historical and that God cannot be understood as existing apart from this historical reality of the world, but rather in the closest relation to it.

It will be recalled that Stevenson's thesis is that history is the "myth" for contemporary man, namely, the image that gives man the true story about himself, his world, and God. Myth is rooted in originating events and arises with its own set of linguistic images "and there is no closer approach to reality than that which is afforded through these images."[4] The myth of history is not contemporary in origin; on the contrary, it must be traced to biblical experience both in the Old and the New Testaments: "biblical experience _is_ historical experience."[5] The inner dynamic is the covenant between God and man, seen and remembered as a historical event. The covenant contains several elements that have become an integral part of historical consciousness:

---

[3] Stevenson, _op. cit._, p. 147.

[4] _Ibid._, p. 6.

[5] _Ibid._, p. 18.

(1) The pattern of promise and fulfillment, so prominent in biblical literature, reflects the characteristic of living out of the past and towards the future, with the past containing the promise and the basis for the trust in God's fidelity to his promises, while the future remains open because the fulfillment turns out to be only partial and always unexpected.

(2) History is given unity by the fact that the God of the covenant and of the promise is one God: God does not have to intervene into history, because history is what he has made. "The unity of history is the presupposition, part of the true story, of history. History is of God and God is one."[6]

(3) Because the covenant is given through events involving persons, places and times, these are invested with great significance, and since the action of God works through these concrete events, the whole created order is loved as the good creation.

(4) Man, as the covenant partner of God, is responsible for history: Yahweh chooses Israel, but Israel must also choose Yahweh. Man's responsibility involves his response to the action of God contributing to the shape of history, as well as his memory of the mighty acts of God giving rise to historical knowledge.

---

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

XUM

Having traced the origin of the historical understanding of reality to biblical experience, Stevenson identifies the beginning of modern historical consciousness with Vico. And it is in Vico that the question of the nature of the God present in history comes to the fore, in the tension between immanence and transcendence. In order to safeguard his understanding of history as that which man has made, Vico seems to eliminate the element of transcendence, but in reality he is only foreshadowing the slowly growing and painful realization that in history man cannot be set aside in order to make room for divine intervention, even in the case of New Testament history. Stevenson sees Vico's position as leading to

> ...an understanding of God's transcendence in which it is seen more fully than before that transcendence cannot be separated from immanence, and, indeed, in which transcendence points to a dimension (whether "depth" or "height" or whatever) of immanence, and says of it: This is a more than human and historical possibility, even though it is absolutely associated with humanity and history.[7]

What does Stevenson mean, then, by the statement that God must be understood as historical in nature? Apparently he wants to say that God participates in the myth of history, that history is the image by which man grasps all of reality, including ultimate reality, personally called God. It might be useful to see Stevenson's proposal in the light of the three notions of history discussed in the preceding chapter: (1) in the context of history as discipline God could not be described as historical, because he cannot be made the object of historical study, but the myth of history would suggest that God is present to man precisely in this history as a participant in what man has made; (2) in the perspective of a philosophy of history Stevenson would agree with Löwith that a vision of universal history originated in biblical experience through the idea of unity in God and the hope of the end of history; (3) it would seem that the category of historical understanding would be the one wherein the statement of the historical nature of God would find its most specific meaning. But does Stevenson accept fully the notions of becoming, contextuality, and relativity in reference to God? An affirmative answer may be implied in the myth of history and in the affinity between his thought and that of Gordon D. Kaufman and Leslie Dewart. But there are other questions that seem unanswered in Stevenson's work. For example, to what extent can modern historical experience be compared with biblical experience? Does the contemporary understanding of history accept the biblical notion of the unity of history because history is of God and God is one? The question of unity is already a philosophical problem and the unity of God is a theological answer. Has the myth of history gone beyond the boundaries of history? Is history once more overcome by theology? Stevenson also wants to say that the myth of history has a Christological foundation. But, if a Christological interpretation of Jesus of Nazareth is an interpretation of faith and theology, does history have a theological foundation?

---

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 56.

How consistent is a concept of God as historical in nature with Stevenson's warning that an objectionable dualism results from the attempt to use mythic images as objective descriptions of a reality beyond history? This question will be raised again later, but first it is necessary to examine in some detail the thought of Gordon D. Kaufman and Leslie Dewart, which Stevenson uses as the springboard for his own conclusions.

Gordon D. Kaufman stands in the broad tradition of historical understanding. In one of his earliest publications he writes about the problem of man's historical nature, and has a statement with which Vico could certainly find himself in full accord: "...the only way we can come to know what kind of a being man is, is through the mediation of the totality of the expressions of man's inner life throughout history."[8] He concludes that to define man's nature is to say that he has, or can have, a history, and that all understanding of man, even this view of his nature, "will be a kind of historical understanding."[9] Kaufman also operates from an empirical philosophical starting point: "...meaning always involves reference to concrete experience, and unless the experiential referent can be located, the meaning of a term or sentence cannot be demonstrated; it is an empty abstraction."[10]

---

[8] Gordon D. Kaufman, _Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith_ (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 128.

[9] _Ibid._, p. 129.

In three important essays Kaufman began to deal with theological terms and issues. In the first one the question was: is there a referent in concrete experience for such terms as "God" and "transcendence"? If by definition God cannot be identified with or contained in any human experience, if God cannot be located in the world, how can any experience whatsoever be brought to bear on the meaning of these terms? The only possibility is to show that these words have a meaning that is similar to certain types of ordinary experience, and then the referents in finite experience can become the analogues for the apprehension of the meaning of such theological words. Analogy is a key idea in Kaufman's work, and it will play a special role in his work on systematic theology. He is aware of the ambiguity inherent in the use of analogy, for it can never be demonstrated that the analogy is actually justified and real. But the use of analogy can make theological terms intelligible, so that their meaningfulness cannot be ruled out a priori.[11] In this essay it also becomes apparent that the experience which he wants to use for his starting point is personal experience. On this basis he suggests two models in concrete experience that may serve as the analogues for the meaning of transcendence:

---

[10] Kaufman, "Two Models of Transcendence: An Inquiry into the Problem of Theological Meaning," in Robert E. Cushman and Egil Grislis, eds., The Heritage of Christian Thought: Essays in Honor of Robert Lowry Calhoun (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p.183.

[11] See ibid., p. 186.

XUM

teleological transcendence, or the experience of the self striving for goals to be realized, and interpersonal transcendence, or the experience of knowledge of other persons, where transcendence is dependent "on the fact that the other self is a reality forever outside my grasp, a reality with a life and activity of his own which becomes open to me only at his will,"[12] if he chooses to unveil or reveal himself through a process of communication. The model of teleological transcendence would lead to a theology of being, while the interpersonal model would lead to a concept of God who acts in a personal way and can only be known if he reveals himself.

The interpersonal model is given new prominence in a 1966 article, "On the Meaning of 'God': Transcendence Without Mythology." Kaufman remarks that the question of language in talk about God is not merely a logical question, but also a quasi-historical one. The quasi-historical context is, again, one of personal experience, namely, man's sense of limitation and finitude, guilt and sin, and man's search for meaning and value for himself and his world: "our speech about this Other arises because certain features of experience force us up against the limit(s) of all possible knowledge and experience."[13] An analysis of personal experience discloses four types of limiting experience: physical limitation, met in the resistance of material objects; organic limitation, found within man's being in illness, weakness, failure, etc.; personal limitation, imposed by the interaction with other selves, in an interpersonal and social context; and the limit of normative restrictions, felt as demands imposed upon the self from the outside. From the analogy of actual physical restrictions any limit that acts upon real beings must be conceived as a reality with some kind of substance and structure. And when the question of the ultimate limit is raised, Kaufman wants to understand it on the model of interpersonal limitation, leading to a doctrine of God conceived in quasi-personal terms. This model is faithful to the biblical tradition and is the only one which "necessarily and intrinsically involves genuine transcendence."[14] Since this is the transcendence of another person existing and acting outside of the self that can become known only when the other unveils his self, the model of the personal limiter in reference to God implies a concept of revelation. Kaufman concludes that his discussion has shown that the meaning of language about God can be made intelligible on the basis of secular experience alone, although this does not say if the language is true or not. Something more is needed in order to affirm the truth of this claim:

---

[12] Ibid., p. 192.

[13] Kaufman, "On the Meaning of 'God': Transcendence Without Mythology," in Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman, New Theology No. 4 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), p. 77. Reprinted from Harvard Theological Review 59, 2 (April, 1966), pp. 105-132.

> Only on the ground that God has in fact revealed himself could it be claimed that he exists; only if there were and is some sort of movement from beyond the Limit to us, making known to us through the medium of the Limit the reality of that which lies beyond, could we be in a

---

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 93.

> position to speak of such reality at all; only if God actually "spoke" to man could we know there is a God. It is of course the Christian claim that God has acted to reveal himself and continues to do so.[15]

With the third essay, an article entitled "On the Meaning of 'Act of God,'" published in 1968, Kaufman returns to the framework of historical understanding. Language about 'acts of God' either in nature or in history no longer can be used as a claim for extraordinary, miraculous interventions of God. Is there another way of using this type of language? Kaufman begins by defining 'act' as "a particular and generally a very specific event brought about by an agent."[16] He stresses the element of novelty and creativity that characterizes the notion of act, and sees the historical order as the product of the cumulation of such acts. He then develops the idea that an act may be divided in many constitutive parts, forming together an overarching purposeful event, for example, from the swinging of the hammer to the building of a house and the development of a city. This perspective also makes it easy to grasp another key point: it is hard to imagine a completely isolated act, and all events must be seen as interrelated. This is the modern vision of the "interrelation and interconnection of all events in an unbroken web,"[17] and the historical consciousness which says "that each new event emerges out of, and can and must be understood in relationship to, the historical context in which it appears."[18] From this background Kaufman proceeds to reformulate the concept of 'acts of God,' and he speaks first of all of a master act of God which is nothing else but the whole course of history, from its beginning in creation to its consummation yet to come: in this sense God provides the context and the meaning of all that occurs, as well as being the source of the overarching order of both nature and history. Secondly, God's master act can also be analyzed in subordinate acts, namely, particular acts which represent the indispensable steps toward the realization of God's ultimate purposes. Kaufman mentions examples both from the evolutionary history of the world, such as the emergence of life, as well as from the history of human civilization, such as the Exodus, the exile, and Jesus as the supreme act of God in this category. "Thus, the whole course of history (including the history of nature and the evolution of life) can be apprehended once again as under God's providential control."[19] In this article Kaufman suggests a theological analysis that is remarkably similar to Vico's historical description of the providence of God at work in the history of man. Kaufman includes the history of nature, which to Vico was unknown, and pays less attention to the role of man in history, because he is proceeding from the perspective of the acts of God. He, nonetheless, does not yet offer a new way of looking at God that would resolve the dilemma of immanence versus transcendence.

---

[15] Ibid., p. 97.

[16] Kaufman, "On the Meaning of 'Act of God,'" Harvard Theological Review 61 (1968), p. 181.

[17] Ibid., p. 187.

---

[18] Ibid., p. 186.

[19] Ibid., p. 198.

Stevenson does not use Kaufman's major work, *Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective*, perhaps because it was not available to him at the time of the writing of his own book. But it must be mentioned here. It is a massive work, and only a few points relevant to the present discussion will be mentioned here.

(1) The main thrust of the previously mentioned works was to make theological language meaningful, not to show that it was true, and the models of personal transcendence, of personal limiter, and of God's acts in history all lead to the conclusion that such a God can only be known if he reveals himself. *Systematic Theology* is a statement of faith that God has indeed revealed himself, and a study of the data of revelation for the purpose of discovering a Christian world-view and a meaning of God that will be in tune with the contemporary world-view.[20]

(2) Analogy is still an indispensable tool for theological thought and language, but now the analogy is taken from the revelatory event, in the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth:

> the authority of the paradigmatic theological symbols derives from the acceptance of the event in which they are rooted as revelatory of ultimate reality (i.e., it derives from a stance of faith with reference to the revelation) and not from anyone's direct or immediate experience or knowledge of God.[21]

---

[20] See Kaufman, *Systematic Theology*, p. 9-11.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 125.

XUM

This is the analogia Christi, but, since Jesus is a person, the primary analogue remains the human person, and God will become known through personal analogies and symbols.

(3) The first part of the book is devoted to the Christian understanding of ultimate reality, or the question of God. Kaufman uses the trinitarian symbols to present his concept of God. The symbol of Father expresses the transcendence of God, because it is associated with the analogies of lordship and creation, and God's transcendence is expressed in very unequivocal terms; God is sufficient to himself, history has personal significance because it is the working out of the purposes of a person, and in his freedom God "wills and purposes what shall be, and in his freedom he produces what he has willed."[22] This image of the absolute lordship of God is somewhat tempered by the use of personalistic images, so that God as Father exercises his rule in terms of intimate personal constraints, and he respects the privacy of persons. The symbol of God as Son signifies the other aspect of God, the incarnational, relational, concrete, historical pole. Kaufman identifies these ideas in the image of the servant, so that in Jesus God must be identified as servant of men. "Son of God" expresses the significance of Jesus and the Christian claim that "there is identity of being between God (the Father) and what is encountered in Jesus"; but this one being is encountered both in history

---

[22] Ibid., p. 143.

XUM

and transcending all history, and even "the manifestation in history is grounded in God's transcendent reality."[23] As a consequence, in Jesus the very being of the transcendent God is present in and to human history, and God in Jesus must be characterized as a servant of men, so that the perfections of divine love as manifested in Jesus describe the relative side of God. This relative side is further signified in the symbol of God the Holy Spirit, which Kaufman translates as Companion, in continuing and faithful presence to his creatures, in "continuous and living relation to their needs and desires and decisions."[24]

Kaufman's system does present some problems. For example, is he consistent in his approach to the Bible, or does he accept an almost fundamentalist use of Scripture alongside an existential demythologizing of biblical events and ideas? More fundamentally, is Kaufman consistent with his stated "historicist" or process metaphysics? Or does he maintain an unresolved duality between the absolute God, Lord and Creator, and the historical God, as Servant and Son? If there is any reconciliation it is to be found in the historical person of Jesus, not in a metaphysical concept or in the biblical images as understood by Kaufman. And even in the question of Jesus it is not clear how the person-event of Jesus Christ defines the revelation of the transcendent God. But Kaufman does an admirable job of describing the transcendent and the immanent God in accurate and clear theological language which would strike a responsive chord for many persons today.

---

[23] Ibid., p. 203.

[24] Ibid., p. 239.

Another author Stevenson cites is Leslie Dewart, who, while sharing many of the same concerns as Gordon D. Kaufman, arrives at somewhat different conclusions. Although both share a concern for the function of language, Dewart is more preoccupied with a theory of language than with its meaning: he argues against the correspondence concept of truth which leads to a view of language as a system of signs, and strongly supports a creative view of language which sees meaning and expression arising together in consciousness so that truth and knowledge and meaning can appear.[25] This is part of an insistent effort on the part of Dewart to distance himself from Greek metaphysics, or more precisely from Aristotelian philosophy and its uses in Thomistic and scholastic philosophy and theology. This continuing opposition is such a determining factor of Dewart's thought that it can hardly be understood apart from this antithesis. He has called his program dehellenization, and, in theology, dehellenization of dogma. Negatively, dehellenization implies a transcending the present which, in effect, in the Roman Catholic tradition means the going beyond and the leaving behind of the inheritance of Greek thought as found in the doctrinal formulations of the councils and in the Thomistic theological tradition. Positively, dehellenization is described "as the conscious historical self-fashioning of the cultural form which Christianity

---

[25] See, e.g., Dewart, Religion, Language and Truth (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), p. 166.

XUM

requires now for the sake of its future."[26] The need for dehellenization comes from the fact that the theology of the Church has been left behind by a culture which has moved away from hellenic forms of thought and has accepted an evolutionary and historical viewpoint. To the extent that Christianity continues to cling to outdated and surpassed cultural forms, it is becoming increasingly irrelevant; and to the extent that the concept of God is expressed in the categories of Greek metaphysics, as the absolute God and Supreme Being, it is becoming meaningless and being confronted by the rejections embodied in atheism. Dewart is one of the voices in the Roman Catholic tradition that has raised the question of the validity of regarding one particular cultural expression either indispensable or privileged for the formulation of Christian doctrine. This attitude could be sustained only if Christianity were somehow outside of the cultural situation or if "some given culture provided the only legitimate conceptual form of Christian religious experience."[27] For Dewart, on the contrary, "the truth of Christianity is a historical, not an eternal, one. Christianity has a contingent, factual, temporal truth, because contingency, factuality and temporality are the notes of God's historical presence and self-revelation to man."[28]

---

[26] Dewart, The Future of Belief: Theism in a World Come of Age (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), p. 50.

[27] Ibid., p. 121.

[28] Ibid.

It is easy to see the importance that history holds in Dewart's presentation. It is part of his rejection of Greek categories of thought, because they abstracted man from history and ignored his reality as a being in history, thus making it impossible for modern man, so conscious of his evolutionary and historical being, to relate to a religious doctrine that remains bound to ahistorical forms and concepts.[29] History is part of Dewart's approach to language and truth, for both thinking and communicating come to be in an evolutionary-historical process: the intelligible constitution of reality is to be found

> ...not within things themselves, in their absoluteness, but in their relations to everything else--just as their explanation for us is to be found in their history--and therefore in the processes in which they take part.[30]

As one commentator has said: "For Dewart, history is not just the setting, is not just the background, is not just the framework of man's knowledge; it is the very 'principle' that 'structures' it."[31] And history also figures prominently in Dewart's attempt at a reconceptualization of the idea of God.

---

[29] See Justus George Lawler, "The Future of Belief Debate," in Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman, eds., New Theology No. 5, p. 182. Reprinted from The Critic XXV, 6 (June-July, 1967), pp. 64-69.

[30] Dewart, Religion, Language and Truth, p. 89. In a footnote to the statement just quoted Dewart wants to differentiate his position from that of Whitehead. Dewart does not say that reality *is* process, but rather that reality is relativity, and therefore *in* process.

[31] Justus George Lawler, op. cit., p. 188.

XUM

Christian theology, as it became more and more dependent on hellenic philosophy, had consistently spoken of God as "being," ens; and the expressions of popular piety and understanding have implied this designation. Dewart's diagnosis is that, as a result, "Christianity suffers from absolute theism,"[32] because the concept of being objectifies God, making him an actual object of knowledge and arguing that it is possible for everyone to know that he actually exists. Dewart is emphatic in saying that God is not being, not a being, not Supreme Being, not being itself. It is not as easy to state what God is, in Dewart's thought: God is a presence, he is present to man in all that exists, he is the reality behind all being that maintains the possibility of openness and transcendence beyond all that is already a matter of fact. Religious experience is ordinary experience, the consciousness that puts man in touch with reality outside of himself, with his own self-presence, with his own freedom. Consciousness always discovers being as already there, as already existing, as a matter of fact; although it could not have been, or been otherwise, and it may cease to be, nothing will ever alter the fact that it is now. Dewart wants to call this condition "absolute contingency," arising not from a priori reasoning but from the consciousness of existing being. But, since man's consciousness also includes his own being, "to be conscious is more or less clearly to understand

---

[32] Dewart, The Future of Belief, p. 171.

XUM

oneself as absolutely contingent in one's very human existence--and to become increasingly conscious of this is to become increasingly problematic to oneself."[33] The problem has become acute in classical metaphysics which has assumed that the meaning of existence is to be found in being. For Dewart, on the other hand, "the meaning of existence cannot indeed be found in being, because it does not exist in being."[34] It must be found elsewhere, in the experience that reality transcends being, although this transcendent reality is revealed only in relation to being. To discover meaning beyond existence itself is religious experience, calling forth the experience of belief: "...the affirmation of that which transcends existence requires belief, because it is the affirmation of that in relation to which man understands himself as having a meaningfulness which he does not have in himself."[35] This reality is God, "the reality in relation to which any other reality is real. God is reality as such."[36]

On the basis of the concept of God as being, the question of immanence and transcendence can only be resolved either by a pantheistic confusion of God with all being, or, as in Catholicism, by paying lip service to an immanent God while worshipping one who is absolutely transcendent. Dewart wants to resolve this dilemma by proposing that it is God's experienced presence in being (immanence) that leads man beyond being (transcendence). And he concludes by defining God as "absolute relativity itself."[37]

---

[33] Dewart, The Foundations of Belief (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), p. 432.

[34] Ibid., p. 438.

[35] Ibid., p. 442.

[36] Ibid., p. 495.

Where does man come to consciousness? Where is the fundamental relation between God and man to be located? For Dewart the answer is: in the reality of history. It is here that the conscious creation of the world takes place, by man, yes, but in the presence of God. God is personally present to man in history, not because God is personal, but because man is personal, and this presence of God to human history assures man's total freedom to create history, in such a way that history remains free, although it is not simply reducible to what man freely makes of it. In Dewart's thought God must either be conceived as historical or he cannot be conceived at all, because God is either present in history or he must be declared as altogether absent. Dewart goes one final step: "...Christian theism may in the future conceive of God as a historical presence, indeed as History, yet a history that would destroy neither human freedom nor God's reality precisely because such a God would not be eternal."[38] This is only a suggestion advanced by Dewart, but it is consistent with the concepts and images he has developed.

Given the tentative aspect of Dewart's reconstruction of the concept of God, it is to be expected that many areas suggest a need for further clarification and elaboration. For the purpose of this study the following questions would seem to be the most urgent: is the problematic of the absolute contingency of being an adequate basis for the affirmation of a reality which transcends being, or is this an unwarranted transition? Can anything at all be said about a God who cannot be properly said to exist but only to be present to existent being? How is God's presence to being to be experienced so that it may be believed? If God is "reality as such" in what sense can he be said to be transcendent?

---

[37] Ibid., p. 498.

[38] Dewart, The Future of Belief, p. 198.

There is a strong affinity between Dewart's theory of language and truth and Vico's intuitions about the joint origin and development of language and thought as part of the historical development of man's being. Dewart's also clearly articulates the role of God's presence in history, but his identification of God with history remains highly ambiguous and would certainly be foreign to Vico's thought. Is there a way of clarifying Dewart's radical conceptualization of God?

W. Taylor Stevenson makes extensive use of Kaufman's analogy of the personal limiter in talking about God. Stevenson sees this image articulated in the Bible and in the historical understanding of reality, and would add that this analogical basis is precisely what has given rise to the attitude that understands reality as historical. Stevenson only takes issue with Kaufman on the question of the possible

XUM

mythological developments of the analogy: contrary to Kaufman, Stevenson argues that the analogy of the personal limiter is no less susceptible of mythological interpretations than the other experiences of limits, and, in fact leads to the myth of history. Stevenson then makes a distinction between mythic and mythological: mythic expresses his own understanding of the image which tells the true story; mythological implies the further step of identifying the image with the reality behind the image. Only the mythological is objectionable, precisely because it loses sight of the fact that the image or myth is the closest that one can get to reality. And yet is this not what Stevenson does when he says that God must be conceived as historical *in nature?* This is the concept that he elaborates with reference to Dewart's *The Future of Belief*. Stevenson then concludes his study of the implication of the myth of history for Christian theology with a mention of the future dimension as expressed in the work of Jürgen Moltmann, and states:

> The immanence of God is manifested through what God and man have made in the course of their historical experience in past and present. The transcendence of God is also manifested in the very substance of historical experience; for, as we have seen, historical experience, while attentive to and guided by the past, continually runs into the future in the ever new creation of meaning and the establishment of the ontology of the world.[39]

---

[39] Stevenson, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

It should be obvious that Vico had broken with the tradition of Greek metaphysics and had moved in a different direction, for which some authors, Stevenson, for example, have discovered roots in the biblical view of God and the world. Vico's thought would certainly be receptive to the adventure of the dehellenization of thought: he had accomplished this himself in the area of historical knowledge, but stopped short of applying his methodology to dogmas. For this reason to describe God as History, or as historical in nature, would not have been intelligible for Vico. Is it intelligible to the modern mind? It would seem that the acceptance of this notion carries with it too much ambiguity because in order to make the concept intelligible too many qualifications must be added. There seems to be an unwarranted transition involved from historical understanding to historical nature. It is one thing to say that God reveals himself in history and that he is in history, because he reveals himself to man who is radically historical. It is another thing to say: God is History. The three authors just discussed would insist that God is historical in Jesus Christ, but this introduces a new dimension, namely the relationship of God to Jesus of Nazareth, which is not explicitly discussed except by Kaufman in his Systematic Theology.

These various attempts to re-think the concept of God from the perspective of his historical immanence and interpersonal relations have succeeded very well in articulating with clarity and cogency the poles of immanence and transcendence, in establishing the need of keeping both aspects equally in view when trying to speak of the ultimate reality which is named God. These modern attempts to locate God in history have made much more explicit the dilemma which Vico either did not see or pushed aside when he also discovered the presence of God in history. But the dilemma does not seem to be fully resolved nor the poles united and reconciled.

II. God in Process: A Metaphysical Approach

There is an area of thought beyond history: it is not exempt from the basic condition of historicity and all its implications, but it is another stage of reflection. "Thus history presupposes a metaphysics," writes Alfred North Whitehead, and by metaphysics he means "the science which seeks to discover the general ideas that are indispensably relevant to the analysis of everything that happens."[40] In contemporary thought there is a good deal of scepticism about the whole metaphysical enterprise, and both its relevance and its validity are under question. There is no intent at this time to present a defense of metaphysical thought in general or of one metaphysical system in particular. Nor is there any intention here of offering either a complete exposition or even a summary of the philosophy of A. N. Whitehead or, much less of the current of thought designated as process thought. The purpose of this section is to examine very briefly the concept of God as found in the process metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead and further elaborated by Charles Hartshorne and John B. Cobb, Jr., in the quest for a conceptualization that will be compatible with Vico's thought and that will bring some unity in Vico's dual vision of God.

---

[40] Whitehead, Religion in the Making (Meridian Books, Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1960), p. 82.

The first statement of A. N. Whitehead on the question of God is found in Science and the Modern World, which is also the beginning of that philosophy of organism that would find its final expression in Process and Reality. At this stage of his thought Whitehead has suggested that reality is made up of events whose process of becoming result in a unit of experience. Each event is further analyzed into "(i) substantial activity, (ii) conditioned potentialities which are there for the synthesis, and (iii) the achieved outcome of the synthesis."[41] Substantial activity, similar to Spinoza's substance, describes an ultimate reality in the process of actualization; the potentialities are the eternal objects, and the achieved outcome is found in the actual occasions. But one more question remains: why this particular mode of becoming rather than the other innumerable possibilities? Why a three dimensional world, for example, rather than one with five dimensions? Limitation appears as an integral part of the process: the limitation of particularity, the limitation of the logical ordering of possibilities and of the selection of relationships, the limitation of antecedent standards of value. The fact of limitations requires "that the course of events should have developed amid an antecedent limitation composed of conditions, particularisation, and standards of value."[42] Whitehead's metaphysical system at this point is in need of a principle of concretion, of limitation, of determination.[43] This principle he calls God. Two things in particular must be noted about Whitehead's concept of God at this time: (1) God is not concrete, but rather "the ground for concrete actuality,"[44] and as such more in the nature of a principle; and (2) God, as the principle of limitation, is an attribute of substantial activity, and therefore he is not ultimate. Whitehead's first intent was to treat of God strictly on a metaphysical basis, leaving aside all religious considerations, just as Aristotle had introduced God into his system as the Prime Mover. But he cannot finally ignore religion, and God becomes available for worship, although further knowledge about him must come from particular religious experiences. After criticizing some of these religious conceptions, Whitehead, "in all diffidence," offers his vision:

---

[41] Whitehead, Science and the Modern World: Lowell Lectures, 1925 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946), pp. 254-55.

---

[42] Ibid., p. 256.

[43] Ibid., pp. 250, 256, 257, respectively.

[44] Ibid., p. 257.

> Religion is the vision of something which stands beyond, behind, and within, the passing flux of immediate things; something which is real, and yet waiting to be realised; something which is a remote possibility, and yet the greatest of present facts; something that gives meaning to all that passes, and yet eludes apprehension; something whose possession is the final good, and yet is beyond all reach; something which is the ultimate ideal, and the hopeless quest.[45]

In 1926, the year following the Lowell Lectures, A.N. Whitehead took the occasion of a series of lectures in King's Chapel, Boston, to continue his study of religion. These were published as Religion in the Making. There is here a definite shift in the metaphysical description of reality which affects the concept of God. The all-inclusive universe is now analyzed into "(1) the actual world, passing in time; and (2) those elements which go to its formation."[46] These elements are: creativity, which takes the place of substantial activity but without being given its absolute ultimacy, ideal entities or forms, and "the actual but non-temporal entity whereby the indetermination of mere creativity is transmuted into a determinate freedom. This non-temporal actual entity is what men call God--the supreme God of rationalized religion."[47] Two important changes must be noted in this passage: (1) God is no longer merely a principle but has become an actual entity, and therefore somehow concrete; (2) God is declared to be non-temporal, because he is not passing in time; to be distinguished from the actual world the formative elements must be either non-actual, as the eternal objects, or non-temporal as God. In this book the beginning of the idea of the two-fold nature of God is also found. On the one hand God is the completed ideal harmony: "This ideal world of conceptual harmonization is merely a description of God himself. Thus the nature of God is the complete conceptual realization of the realm of ideal forms."[48] On the other hand God is related to the actual world through the link of the ideal forms: "Apart from God there would be no actual world; and apart from the actual world with its creativity, there would be no rational explanation for the ideal vision which constitutes God."[49] And Whitehead moves even a step further in implying that God is affected by the world:

---

[45] Ibid., p. 275.

[46] Whitehead, Religion in the Making, p. 87.

[47] Ibid., p. 88.

> He is the binding element of the world....Thus all attainment is immortal in that it fashions the actual ideals which are God in the world as it is now. Every act leaves the world with a deeper or a fainter impress of God. He then passes into his next relation to the world with enlarged, or diminished, presentation of ideal values.[50]

And, again, alongside the metaphysical notion of God there is here a description of God that would lend itself to worship and religious experience, God as "the ideal companion who transmutes what has been lost into a living fact within his own nature," God who knows suffering and pain but as an element of significant value in the rhythm of things, God who is acquainted with evil but as overcome by good, God who can reveal to every creature its value and greatness.[51]

---

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 148. An interesting possibility for further *study* might be a comparison of Whitehead's "completed ideal harmony" with Vico's "ideal eternal history."

[49] *Ibid.*, pp. 150-51.

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 152.

In a movement of thought reaching its climax in Process and Reality, science has suggested to Whitehead a cosmology, i.e., an organic vision of the world, which, in turn, suggests a religion, i.e., a reflection on the intuition of order and ultimacy. And the concept of God suggested by his cosmology must be found within that vision of the world; it cannot be introduced from another realm as the source of explanation, because there is no other actual realm; rather, it must be the chief exemplification of the metaphysical principles derived through the process of generalization from ordinary experience. In Process and Reality the dipolar nature of God that was first implied in Religion in the Making is articulated explicitly: God has a primordial nature and a consequent nature.

Whitehead has not changed his original intuition of God as the principle of limitation, but now he becomes more specific as to its function and as to its nature. The nature is God as primordial, the function is to provide for each actual occasion its initial aim or the initial phase of the subjective aim. In the more systematic analysis of Process and Reality it may appear that new occasions can provide for themselves their own principle of limitation and definiteness, through the subjective aim towards a determinate satisfaction. But a further question remains: how does the new occasion choose this particular subjective aim out of the indefinite possibilities of forms of definiteness? Is the experienced order the result of sheer chance? Not for Whitehead: for him, rather, limitation and determination are the result of an original derivation of the subjective aim from God, which functions in two ways: (1) the initial aim provides the locus or standpoint which the new occasion will occupy, thus determining its past and what is available for its positive and negative prehensions;[52] (2) the initial aim also provides an initial satisfaction for the subjective aim, thus influencing the satisfaction ultimately attained; this initial satisfaction would include both the aim of the best possible actualization in the given situation, as well as indeterminations awaiting the free decision by the occasion in subsequent phases.[53] The principle of determination,

---

[51] Ibid., pp. 148-49.

---

[52] Whitehead, Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology (Harper Torchbooks, New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p. 434: "The quantum is that standpoint in the extensive continuum which is consonant with the subjective aim in its original derivation from God." See, also, John B. Cobb, Jr., A Christian Natural Theology: Based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1965), pp. 151-53.

[53] Whitehead, ibid., p. 373: "But the initial stage of its aim is an endowment which the subject inherits from the inevitable ordering of things, conceptually realized in the nature of God." And, p. 375: "But as soon as individual experience is not negligible, the autonomy of the subject in the modification of its initial subjective aim must be taken into account." See Cobb, A Christian Natural Theology, pp. 153-54.

XUM

therefore, is to be found in the primordial nature of God as the ordered relevance of eternal objects, which yet can be specific for each new occasion through the envisagement of an indefinite variety of orders.[54] At this point, as Cobb brings out, two developments have occurred in the concept of God from the position of Religion in the Making. First, the envisagement by God of the eternal objects allows them to share in the actuality of God, and, therefore, to be "somewhere" according to the ontological principle: thus God also becomes the principle of potentiality. Secondly, "the ordering of the eternal objects in relation to the new occasion is seen as essential not only for their aim at a value compatible with the order of the universe but also for the realization of novelty....Apart from God, there could be no novelty in the world."[55]

The concept of the consequent nature of God is not as well developed and more problematic. First, the consequent nature of God corresponds to the physical pole in each actual entity and it "originates with physical experience derived from the temporal world, and then acquires integration with the primordial side."[56] Secondly, the consequent nature of God answers the problem of "actuality with fluency, requiring permanence as its completion," the problem of "the completion

---

[54] See Cobb, ibid., p. 155.

[55] Cobb, ibid., pp. 160-61.

[56] Whitehead, Process and Reality, p. 524.

XUM

of each fluent occasion by its function of objective immortality, devoid of 'perpetual perishing,' that is to say 'everlasting.'"[57] This God accomplishes as his judgment on the world: "He saves the world as it passes into the immediacy of his own life."[58] Thirdly, the consequent nature of God is received back and becomes available for further emerging processes. "Thus each temporal occasion embodies God, and is embodied in God....Also the World's nature is a primordial datum for God; and God's nature is a primordial datum for the World."[59]

In a famous page Whitehead presents a series of oppositions, one would almost say contradictions, concerning the concept of God. Traditionally philosophers have chosen either one or the other of these opposites, but Whitehead with his concept of the primordial and consequent nature of God, has reduced the opposition into a contrast which does not exclude either set of terms. As John B. Cobb writes:

> The main point is to underscore the contrast of the implications of his philosophy with the traditional doctrines that have insisted only on the permanence, unity, eminent actuality, transcendence, and creative power of God. All of these he affirms, but only in polar tension with other factors usually negated of God.[60]

A discussion of Alfred North Whitehead's reconceptualization of the idea of God cannot conclude without including some of the religious insights also contained in Process and Reality. Alongside the profound metaphysical presentation there are also expressions that seem open to the feeling of worship and available for religious experience. From this perspective, made available by the concept of the consequent nature of God, Whitehead can use for God the image "of a tender care that nothing be lost," "of a tenderness which loses nothing that can be saved," but rather, in a judgment of wisdom, uses even "what in the temporal world is mere wreckage."[61] God "does not create the world, he saves it: or, more accurately, he is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty, and goodness."[62] Again, by reason of the interaction between God and the world "the love in the world passes into the love in heaven, and floods back again into the world. In this sense, God is the great companion--the fellow-sufferer who understands." And

---

[57] Ibid., p. 527.

[58] Ibid., p. 525.

[59] Ibid., p. 529.

[60] Cobb, A Christian Natural Theology, p. 166. See Whitehead, Process and Reality, p. 528.

> In this way, the insistent craving is justified--the insistent craving that zest for existence be refreshed by the ever-present, unfading importance of our immediate actions, which perish and yet live for evermore.[63]

Of the many authors who have used the philosophical perspective of A. N. Whitehead in their own philosophical or theological thinking, two will be examined here briefly because they have devoted a good deal of their writings to the question of God, Charles Hartshorne and John B. Cobb, Jr.

---

[61] Whitehead, *ibid*., p. 525.

[62] *Ibid*., p. 526.

[63] *Ibid*., p. 533.

The work of Charles Hartshorne is of interest here because of his protracted attention and elaboration of the dipolar character of God. In a dialogue with classical theism that is designed to surpass and reconstruct the meaning of classical terms, Hartshorne develops a strictly metaphysical, highly rational natural theology. This natural theology, however, should not be understood as a proof or demonstration of the existence of God. God's existence is a matter of faith, because only faith can relate man to God, only the intuition or insight, the sense of trust that worship is not just empty nonsense: for Hartshorne Anselm's proof presupposes faith, and "the problem of unbelief is a pure problem of meaning and self-understanding, not of what the facts happen to be."[64] Hartshorne's work offers "proofs" only in the sense that it tries to display the coherence and clarity of the idea of God. And this coherence and clarity arises from a re-examination and re-definition of some widely used terms, such as perfection and supreme, absolute and relative.

The classical notion of perfection demanded immutability, because change was thought to imply a defect to be remedied or a lack to be filled, and this would be incompatible with the other demand of perfection, namely, the possession in maximum fullness of everything that could be conceived of as a good. Hartshorne challenges this understanding of perfection by pointing out first, that for the modern viewpoint immutability as such is not necessarily a perfection nor change a weakness; secondly, that an absolute maximum of all perfections is a logical impossibility; and, thirdly, that in biblical use perfection has a purely ethical reference.[65] Hartshorne understands perfection not as the actualization of all possible perfection, but as the actual possession of all actual values, so that, while a perfect being must be unsurpassed by all others, there is no reason not to conceive him as being able to surpass himself.[66]

---

[64] Hartshorne, The Logic of Perfection and Other Essays in Neoclassical Metaphysics (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing Company, 1962), p. 111. See, also, Hartshorne, A Natural Theology for Our Time (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1967), p. 88.

Classical theism has denied the possibility of real relations in God, in order to avoid any semblance of dependency in him. The world has real relations with God because it is most certainly dependent on him, but on the part of God,the relations are only external, or nominal; otherwise he would be affected by everything that happens in the world. Hartshorne points out that this is a complete reversal of the experience of knowing and loving, where the knower and the lover are profoundly affected both by the object of knowing and loving and by its activity. Does it make sense to say that human beings and the world are known and loved and willed by God, while being unable to say that God actually loves and knows his creatures? In Hartshorne's thought all life whatsoever has a social structure and exists in relations, and so does God. There is a sense in which independence is admirable, and in this sense God will preserve his holiness and goodness independent of man's will and actions. But there is also a sense in which independence is detestable, as in a tyrant in the exercise of absolute power, or in a person who cares for no one but his own self: this independence is not descriptive of the God who is worshipped. There is a sense in which God is absolute, namely, open to all possible worlds and therefore not related by necessity to any one specific possibility. But there is also a sense in which God is relative, surrelative in Hartshorne's terminology, insofar as he interacts with all existing individuals:

---

[65] See, e.g., A Natural Theology for Our Time, pp. 18-20; Hartshorne, The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), pp.19-22.

[66] See, e.g., A Natural Theology for Our Time, pp. 71-72.

> ...the surrelative actuality of God is the highest actualized level of concreteness, subject surveying all actual objects, event subsequent to all actual events and not contemporaneous with it. In this aspect God is not pure being but total actual being of a given moment, with all achieved determinations.[67]

What is supreme in God is that, while all beings have some measure of both absoluteness and relativity, only God is in one aspect totally absolute and in another totally relative. In Hartshorne's neoclassical theism God is still the only unconditionally necessary existent, infinite, eternal,

---

[67] Hartshorne, The Divine Relativity, p. 88.

XUM

immutable, and with all the other classical attributes, but this is not the whole concept of God: this is the metaphysical abstraction from the all-inclusive, surrelative, self-surpassing, actual God. This is the dipolar image of God developed by Hartshorne, in a theory that he has described as Panentheism, or the thesis that "the 'relative' or changeable, that which depends upon and varies with varying relationships, includes within itself and in value exceeds the nonrelative, immutable, independent, or 'absolute,' *as the concrete includes and exceeds the abstract*."[68]

Thus Hartshorne's God is internally related to all that exists, sympathetically dependent on everything in the process of becoming, molding himself by molding the world, "all actuality in one individual actuality, and all possibility in one individual potentiality."[69] God is infinite, not in what he is but in what he could be; but he is also the fullness of reality and therefore infinitely richer than a mere abstraction. Hartshorne outlines three main ways of thinking about God: (1) God as perfect and complete in all respects, or (2) God as perfect and complete in some respects but not in all, or (3) God as not completely perfect in any respect. A God perfect in all ways cannot change or increase in value, and therefore nothing done by man could make any real difference; and such a God could not love in a proper sense, "for to love is to find joy in the joy of others and sorrow in their sorrows..."[70] A God perfect in no way would be in every way subject to imperfection and alteration, and thus scarcely deserving of worship. "Thus, only the second possibility is left, that God is perfect in love, but never-completed, ever growing (partly through our efforts) in the joy, the richness of his life, and this without end through all the infinite future."[71]

---

[68] *Ibid*., p. ix.

[69] Hartshorne, *A Natural Theology for Our Time*, p. 21.

John B. Cobb, Jr., is a contemporary theologian who has faithfully interpreted the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead and creatively used it as a basis for his own thinking. He has also been a student of Charles Hartshorne and in some ways reflects the elaboration of the seminal thought of Whitehead on the concept of God as found in the work of Hartshorne. Cobb is able to clarify some of the obscurities, to render explicit what is only implicit, and to go beyond some of the limitations contained in the philosophy of A. N. Whitehead. He thus makes some significant advances toward a theological system that does justice to the viewpoint of process thought and the experience of contemporary man. Some of the more significant advances for the purposes of this study would be contained in the following points.

---

[70] Hartshorne, Reality as Social Process: Studies in Metaphysics and Religion (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1953), p. 156.

[71] Ibid.

XUM

(1) Whitehead's concept of the consequent nature of God introduces some kind of process and becoming in God. But what kind of process? It can only be either the kind of process that occurs between successive occasions or the kind of process that exists within the actual entity. Whitehead would seem to hold for the latter, since for him God is an actual entity. But this process has no influence on other occasions except when it is completed by its satisfaction and thus becomes an object for a new occasion. God, then, could have causal efficacy only in successive phases within himself, while Whitehead affirms his influence on all the events of the actual world. Whitehead also speaks of God's satisfaction as something real, which would seem to indicate a succession of actual occasions, at least in the consequent nature of God. And the primordial nature of God, although not affected by process in the envisaging of the eternal objects, must take into account the actual situation of the world in the entertaining of specific aims for the new occasions: the primordial nature, then, cannot be completely distinct and separable from the consequent nature of God. In order to clarify the question of time and process in God, as well as God's relation to the world and the intimate bond between the primordial and consequent nature, Cobb thinks that God should be described as a living person, i.e., as a succession of occasions or moments of experience with the special continuity given by memory, or the apprehension of past

experiences in a conceptual mode which allows the preservation of self-identity. Because "the living person is defined by a temporal relationship among actual occasions,"[72] God would be regarded as temporal, contrary to Whitehead's notion of God as a non-temporal actual entity. This modification of Whitehead's theory would seem to clarify the question of God's participation in and relationship to history.

(2) John B. Cobb also wants to attribute to God a more decisive role in creation than Whitehead had intended. For Whitehead creativity seems to play the ultimate role in creation, and he suggests that creativity is "another rendering of the Aristotelian 'matter,' and of the modern 'neutral stuff.'"[73] But creativity does not have an independent existence nor shares in the notion of passive receptivity of the Aristotelian matter. It is without a character of its own and is always conditioned by God and by the world, by the all-inclusive valuation and by the objective immortality of actual entities. Although creativity as such is a pure notion, neither concrete nor actual, it is also that without which nothing can be. But does creativity answer the question why anything exists? Whitehead never raises this question, but creativity cannot be the answer. It is an integral part of everything that is, but it cannot by itself be the answer as to why any particular entity occurs. In Whitehead's

---

[72] Cobb, A Christian Natural Theology, p. 190.

[73] Whitehead, Process and Reality, p. 46.

system the question must be referred to the decision of the actual occasions. But if the process is initiated in a decisive way by the initial aim, and if this aim is due largely to the function of God, it would seem that God enters the decision of why entities occur to a greater degree than Whitehead made explicit. Cobb reaches the conclusion that God is the only adequate answer to the question of what causes new occasions to come into being. Thus God becomes an eminent instance of creativity. Cobb states:

> ...we may say in summary that God always (and some temporal occasions sometimes) is the reason that each new occasion becomes. God, past occasions, and the new occasion are conjointly the reason for what it becomes. Whatever it becomes, it will always, necessarily, be a new embodiment of creativity.[74]

(3) In God and the World, against anyone who would proclaim that modern man must choose either God or the world, Cobb affirms that man must choose both God and the world, because "God is in the world and the world is in and from God."[75] He begins by examining some of the traditional ways of thinking about God in the light of contemporary experience. The notions of God as Creator, Lord of History, Lawgiver and Judge do not seem to fit man's present experience of his world. The presence of evil in the world raises some serious problems with the concept of God as Creator and, as Lord of History, Lawgiver and Judge, God seems to operate against the

---

[74] Cobb, A Christian Natural Theology, p. 214.

[75] Cobb, God and the World (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), p. 9.

best aspirations of man: these notions seem to say that man is powerless in the hands of God who is experienced as the enemy to man's claim for dignity, to his desires to assume responsibility for himself and to become whole and free.[76] But the Christian experience is not essentially tied to these conceptualizations. The God whom the Christian meets in Jesus is something quite different, someone who calls for responsibility as response in freedom, someone who is "for us" rather than "against us," someone who does not judge from on high but, rather, has pitched his tent among men. In trying to offer a new conceptualization Cobb focuses on the aspect of man's openness towards the future, on the experience of a "call forward," as expressed in the concern for truth, in the disinterested concern for others. Cobb argues that this call forward is something distinctive in human experience, that this call suggests something which is calling, and that this something can appropriately be called God.

> If now we understand God fundamentally as He Who Calls us to ever-greater love, life, and freedom, this does not exclude the possibility that he is also in some important sense the Ground of our being. Perhaps we must recognize that it is precisely the call to be something more than we have been which initiates and activates every new act of being by which we constitute ourselves.[77]

In a chapter on evil and the power of God Cobb elaborates with clarity and depth Whitehead's notion of persuasion.

---

[76] See ibid., pp. 27-29. It should be noted that what Cobb describes as the Lord of History is a different way of conceiving God than Vico's historical providence.

[77] Ibid., p. 65.

The height of power is not the ability to force and to compel, to determine what will be and how it will be. The only worthwhile way to deal with another who shares in freedom and creativity is through persuasion: "Persuasion is the means of exercising power upon the powerful."[78] This means that God accepts the world as given to him at every moment and seeks to work with it and to lure it by his persuasive power towards new realizations of good and an ideal of harmony and an intensity of beauty. Again, in the words of Cobb,

> We must not ask at any given point why God caused just that world to be. Rather we must ask why, given that world, God seeks to persuade it in the way he does. We must think of God's new act of persuasion in each moment as conditioned by just that world which he there confronts. That world, in turn, of course, reflects the influence of God's earlier persuasion, but it is not identical with what he willed it to be. And the world God will confront in the next moment, although influenced by his present persuasion, will not fully embody even the very relative ideal he offers it now.[79]

The paragraph just quoted could be used to describe Vico's understanding of the action of providence in history. The language is very different, of course. Vico has in mind broader stages of developing civilization, rather than the innumerable sequences of minute processes of concretion. And Vico writes as if the provident God took the completed action of man and, rescuing it from its selfish intents, transformed it into something different to fulfill his own purposes. But this way of reading Vico overlooks the fact that the next stage, or the new that emerges, is still part of the world of civilization and, therefore, part of the world which man has created.[80]

---

[78] *Ibid.*, p. 90. Cobb uses the image of the potter to describe power as a compelling force, an image which Vico also had rejected. See, also, *ibid.*, p. 89.

[79] *Ibid.*, p. 92.

In examining the relevance of the metaphysical perspective on the notion of God, just outlined, to the thought of Giambattista Vico, several points of contact and similarity could be indicated. For example, A. Robert Caponigri and Nicola Badaloni call attention to the saving, conserving, preserving action of Vico's providence, concepts reminiscent of Whitehead's "tender care that nothing be lost."[81] Or, again for Caponigri, the function of providence in Vico is that of reconciling the ideal and the temporal order, in an ideal process transpiring through time: "...providence appears in its logico-historical function, that of insuring the steady emergence of the idea through the time process of the formations of the structures of culture."[82] Could this be the function of God as the principle of concretion and of novelty? And, with an intensity similar to that of Hartshorne, Vico builds his system on the basis of a sociality that establishes man in a community with God and with his fellow human beings. Finally, it might even be suggested that Vico's historical vision might be useful in specifying the concrete aspect of reality: while abstractly any actualization might be possible, as for Hartshorne, in the concrete situation of the present the past is no longer open to different determinations. History and historical understanding suggest that while any actuality may have been possible, history has not only given determination to the past but also limits the future to the extent that it supplies data for the ongoing process.

---

[80] See, e.g., Vico, Scienza nuova III (1744), #132-33, 385.

[81] See Caponigri, Time and Idea, p. 99; Badaloni, Introduzione a G. B. Vico, pp. 384-85. But Badaloni interprets providence more in a naturalistic sense, and almost makes it the equivalent of the instinct of self-preservation.

[82] Caponigri, op. cit., p. 93.

The main conclusion, however, must be discovered in the real possibility that the dipolar image of God may be able to supply some final coherence to Vico's thought without forcing him either into pantheism or the rigidity of classical theism. The primordial nature, or the abstract, absolute pole in God, preserves that transcendence which Vico maintained so carefully through his faith. The consequent nature, or the concrete, relative pole, would allow the transcendent God to be fully immanent, to be fully present to and active in the total process of history, as the philosophy of Vico seems to demand. A careful reading of Vico would seem to indicate that the vision he achieved in the *Scienza nuova* would be found compatible and, in a very important sense, completed by a concept of God involving two aspects of which contrasting predications may be made without breaking down in contradiction, while God remains the One Who Calls forward each drop of experience and the whole historical process.

III. God in Jesus Christ: The Possibility of Synthesis

The cultural-historical approach to a reconceptualization of the idea of God, presented in the first part of this chapter, makes clear the need for a new way of thinking about God and, in its articulation of the two poles of a God of history and a God in history, offers a convincing image of the presence of God in and to history, but fails to spell out how this can be logically conceived.

The metaphysical approach, just examined, offers a philosophically consistent way of grasping intellectually the manner of God's involvement in the world, but it may at times be faulted for being too abstract and rationalistic, and not sufficiently empirical.[83]

Is there a point of contact between these two approaches in the historical presence of God in Jesus of Nazareth? This is the Christian assertion: that God has become part of the world in Jesus Christ, or that it is in the life of Jesus "that the central act of God's dealing with human history took place."[84] There are of course innumerable ways of interpreting the Christian assertion, but perhaps the historical person of Jesus may serve as the justification for the historicist's theological language and as the exemplification of the metaphysical notion of a consequent, relative aspect in God.

---

[83] For example, John B. Cobb and Professor Bernard M. Loomer remark that Whitehead's consequent nature of God may not be an empirical concept at all, but rather a speculative extension of Whitehead's doctrine. Dr. Loomer adds that it can only be established by rationalistic methods, such as Hartshorne's ontological argument, seen as "an attempt to prove by rational means that Whitehead's concrete God necessarily exists, that the universe is one organic unity and that it necessarily exists (although the actual state of affairs is not necessary)." Loomer, "Empirical Theology within Process Thought," in Bernard E. Meland, ed., The Future of Empirical Theology (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 167-68. See Cobb, A Christian Natural Theology, p. 167.

[84] Daniel Day Williams, The Spirit and the Forms of Love (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 156.

W. Taylor Stevenson borrows from Martin Buber's *I and Thou* the language of the "original relational incident" or event, a personal encounter in which language plays an essential role, and makes this event one of the three formal characteristics of all myths. In the myth of history, originating events mark a point in history, supply a standpoint for its interpretation, and call for a decision from one who accepts them. Jesus of Nazareth is the original relational event for Christian faith, the personal encounter where God and man come together. Since every relational event is a language event, to separate the historical Jesus from the Christ of faith would be to fall in the fallacy of the false disjunction, i.e., the separation of fact and interpretation.[85] God has entered history as the Father of Jesus Christ, and that is why this event defines reality for the Christian, the world and his own self, and defines reality as historical in nature. In Jesus Christ the constitutive elements of the myth of history are fulfilled: there is the fulfillment of previous promises and the giving of new ones, history is revealed as the realm of God's rule, the human and created

---

[85] See, e.g., Stevenson, op. cit., pp. 82, 142. The notion of the "fallacy of the false disjunction" is borrowed from R. G. Collingwood.

XUM

order are shown in their great significance, man's dignity and his responsibility for creation are reasserted.

There is no systematic Christology in Stevenson's work, but one point must be mentioned here: he applies to Jesus one of Vico's foundational axioms about historical thinking, namely, that the nature of institutions is their being born at a certain time and in a certain fashion. Stevenson writes:

> Thus, who is Jesus Christ? He is the man who came into being at the time and in the fashion described in the language of the New Testament--language which consists (when all is said and done) of what Jesus said and what was said in response to him, either directly or in the traditions of the Church. This language of address and response contains all that we can know about the nature (the "time" and "fashion") of Jesus.[86]

In the work of Leslie Dewart the fragmentary material on Jesus is secondary to his main intent of criticizing the hellenic heritage as an adequate conceptualization for Christian thought and of presenting a different theory of knowledge and truth for the sake of a Christian theology that will speak to contemporary man. But in suggesting God's presence in history he makes the point that God does not merely touch history from a distance, but he immerses himself in it. God comes to stay: "He arrives most concretely and decisively of all in the person of the Word in order to make earth and history his home, his permanent residence, his

---

[86] Ibid., pp. 143-44.

XUM

ever-lasting abode."[87] Jesus thus becomes the epiphany of God, a new revelation because in Jesus God has given himself to man: "He comes in person to deliver his message and, moreover, his message is no other than himself."[88] Jesus is the fullness of God's self-revelation, but this does not mean that his self-revealing presence has ceased; on the contrary it continues to be offered to man throughout history. Trinitarian and Christological doctrine must still begin with the formulas of Nicaea, Constantinople and Chalcedon because Christian theology has not managed to do better since then, but, if they are points of departure, theology must now move on and go beyond. Consistent with his concept of God as the reality behind being but present to being, Dewart would interpret the Trinity as three different modes of God's self-communication. And, consistent with his theory of human knowledge, he concludes that Jesus had a human personality, because a person is a being that can make his own self the object of consciousness and know itself as human: "If Jesus was unable to think of himself as a human being, to have a human consciousness--and, thus, to be a human person--then he was not a true human being."[89] The precise relationship of God to the man Jesus of Nazareth is not yet clearly worked out, but the awareness that God has come to stay in man's history and to share in man's time in the historical Jesus is undeniable.

---

[87] Dewart, _The Future of Belief_, p. 194.

[88] _Ibid._, p. 137.

[89] _Ibid._, p. 151.

For Gordon D. Kaufman the fundamental category of historical thinking, which is presupposed in all processes of thought, is the category of meaning, the drive to discover structure and coherence in the complex of relationships which is the context for everything that exists. In the totality of experience, however, not all events have the same level of meaning: some seem to be more significant than others. It is in terms of these special moments that both personal as well as historical experience can be organized into a meaningful whole. In the case of systems of thought Kaufman speaks of these moments which seem to illuminate and make sense of the rest as centers of history, and calls them Christological centers on the basis of the experience of the Christian community for whom Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, has become the focus of faith and orientation.[90] For Christian theology the Christological center, this historical figure of a man from Galilee, is the image that gives meaning even to the experience of and the language about God: a Christian uses the analogy of the human person in his understanding of God on the basis of the analogia Christi. There is no doubt that, for Kaufman, this analogy of Christ, accepted in faith, allows man to encounter the reality of God, who is to be found in this man and in these events: "'God' is that reality which comes to man in and through the person Jesus Christ."[91] Kaufman does not hesitate to examine explicitly and at length the crucial theological question of the relationship of the transcendent God to the man Jesus. He describes the traditional dogmas of the incarnation and the divinity of Jesus as historico-mythological doctrines, but he retains the language, while trying to remove the misunderstandings that surround them. For example, to speak of Jesus as God incarnate is not to state an observable fact or a demonstrable truth but a confession of faith: "this person-event is the norm for the content which the word 'God' has... here are found the chief analogies and symbols for understanding ultimate reality."[92] To say that Jesus Christ is truly God and truly man expresses the fundamental *assumption* of the Christian faith: "that in this man Jesus, *God* has come to man and revealed himself; that in this person-event, then, is not only man but also God."[93] Some of the accepted titles of Jesus, symbolically understood, contribute important elements to the analogy by which God's presence to man in Jesus can be expressed: "servant of God" states that this human being, in his freedom, becomes obedient to God's will; "word of God" emphasizes that God himself is present in this human person in the act of communicating himself to man as the authentic meaning of human life; "son of God" expresses the conviction that God communicates himself by his presence in Jesus Christ.[94] There may be problems in Kaufman's presentation in trying to identify the limits between the conclusions of faith and those of historical or logical reason, between symbolic and real meaning, but there can be no doubt about his intention of confessing that the self-sufficient, transcendent God of rational theology is present in the concrete of human existence and human history in the person of the man Jesus.

---

[90] Kaufman, Relativism, Knowledge and Faith, pp. 107-09.

---

[91] Kaufman, *Systematic Theology*, p. 97.

[92] *Ibid.*, p. 181.

[93] *Ibid.*, p. 186.

If a broad generalization might be permitted, in the full awareness of the many and substantial qualifications that might be required, it might be said that authors who approach the notion of God from a cultural-historical standpoint are more inclined to see in Jesus the moment when God becomes historical and concrete, while authors with roots in Whitehead's metaphysics are more apt to see in Jesus an instance of what God always is.

A. N. Whitehead was critical of the history of Christianity and of the images of God it had developed in response to the historical situation and in conjunction with other currents of thought, the images of God as the imperial ruler, the ruthless moralist, and the ultimate philosophical principle. But in contrast to these main themes he sees in the "Galilean origin of Christianity" another suggestion that is very compatible with his own concept of God. This suggestion

---

[94] See *ibid.*, p. 205.

"dwells upon the tender elements in the world, which slowly and in quietness operate by love; and it finds purpose in the present immediacy of a kingdom not of this world. Love neither rules nor is unmoved; also it is a little oblivious as to morals."[95] Whitehead returns to this theme and looks at the Christian claim that the life of Christ is "a revelation of the nature of God and of his agency in the world." He then speaks of the elements in the record of this revelation that have stimulated the best that is in man:

> The Mother, the Child, and the bare manger: the lowly man, homeless and self-forgetful, with his message of peace, love, and sympathy: the suffering, the agony, the tender words as life ebbed, the final despair: and the whole with the authority of supreme victory.[96]

In this lies the actual revelation of Plato's theoretical divination, i.e., that the divine element operates in the world as a persuasive rather than as a coercive power.

A study of the suggestions and of the limited attempts to develop a Christology from the premises of Whitehead's metaphysics would uncover many significant and different insights. Some of them will be briefly mentioned here.

1. Whitehead's method of descriptive generalization is applicable in Christology. Jesus of Nazareth will be regarded as the basis for this methodological process, as an instance of special significance because the analysis of this

---

[95] Whitehead, Process and Reality, p. 520.

[96] Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas (Mentor Book, New York: The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., n.d.), p. 170.

complex event and experience will supply from its most basic structure elements that can be generalized into a description of the ultimate structure of both God and man and of their relationship: "The christological event, as revelatory, has a fundamental character which is taken as the basic clue to the nature of ultimate reality."[97]

2. The event of Jesus Christ reveals the essential relatedness of God. The existence of real, internal relations in God is one of the main emphases of a philosophy based on the thought of Whitehead. There would be agreement on this point with other currents of thought, but the distinctive feature here would be the insistence that God did not _become_ related only through Jesus Christ, because he always was in intimate, mutual relationship to the world. In Hartshorne's philosophy Jesus concretely represents God's contingency and passivity, "the way in which God participates in the sorrow and joy, wealth and burden of the world," especially in the sublime symbol of the cross.[98] It may be that for Hartshorne the abstract characterization of God as one who loves man and suffers with him is no longer abstract by being contained in a concrete event.[99] But this should not imply that God's rejoicing and suffering with the world was merely abstract before being concretely expressed in Jesus.

---

[97] Loomer, _op. cit_., p. 163; see, also, p. 161.

[98] Ralph E. James, _The Concrete God: A New Beginning for Theology--The Thought of Charles Hartshorne_ (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1967), pp. 131-32.

[99] _Ibid_., p. 146.

3. The event of Jesus Christ has a great deal to say about man. Various aspects of man's being can be examined under this general heading. If the metaphysical question of man's nature is given prominence, Christology will bring out "the co-presence or even the inseparability of God and man," the continuity of man's deepest nature with God's own nature.[100] From a more existential perspective Christology affirms, among other things, the essential goodness of man, the inevitability and the value of suffering, the openness to the future of human existence, and the meaning and mystery of love: it will recognize "the way in which Jesus gave witness to the love of God, and confess him as the one through whom we know who we really are: creatures who can love one another and God and share our being with all his wondrous creation."[101]

4. What can be said about Jesus himself and the traditional questions about his person and nature(s)? Authors would generally agree that Jesus cannot be treated as an exception to metaphysical principles that have to do with the nature of an historical occasion and the being of man. Positively, this affirms that Jesus is also fully related, dependent on, and to a certain extent determined by the total context of his being which includes nature, history, and society, as well as God: "Christ's relations to his fellows and theirs

---

[100] Loomer, op. cit., pp. 161, 162.

[101] Daniel Day Williams, op. cit., p. 172; see, also, pp. 170-71.

to him were constitutive of his very being."[102] Thus past history and the cultural environment of his time achieve a full measure of importance for Jesus, and his humanity is asserted in the strongest terms. Negatively, to describe Jesus in the categories that are applicable to all men would seem to deny any exclusiveness or essential difference to his being.

In what sense, then, can Jesus be described as unique or essentially different from other men? Is there any distinctive way in which he can be called divine? These traditional affirmations appear very problematic on the basis of an organismic philosophy of process, and it is at this point that the contrast with previous Christologies would become the greatest. This philosophical perspective could speak of differences in degrees of intensity or massiveness, but not of essential differences. Therefore, Jesus would be unique as any historical person is unique, although perhaps more so; he could be called divine, literally, because he is God loving and a part of God, symbolically, because his own loving points analogically to the reality of God as love.[103] The possibility of full human life, which before was only an abstraction, has become more concrete because of its realization in Jesus Christ: "His life...was a historical breakthrough which is empowering; it makes our exemplification a nearer possibility."[104] In him a new structure of existence, self-transcending existence in self-giving love, makes its appearance.[105] Jesus is "the coincidence of God's action or agency and man's responsive action or agency" in the context of a fully human life and "in a degree not elsewhere known in human existence."[106] The uniqueness of Jesus is seen "in his speciality, his supreme and decisive expression of that which God always and everywhere is 'up to' in his world." On the basis of a distinction between a uniqueness of exclusion and one of inclusion, Jesus is not unique by exclusion as if God could be said to be operative only in him and because of him, but "he is unique by inclusion, in that he includes, takes up into himself, and gives point to all that God is doing, has done, and will do."[107] But this approach seems to leave unanswered the question of why Christian faith can say all these things about Jesus: what makes him this peculiar meeting point of God and man? Is it just the fidelity of his human response, or the richness of the gift of God, or perhaps both?[108]

---

[102] Loomer, op. cit., p. 163.

[103] See, e.g., Ralph E. James, op. cit., p. 133.

[104] Loomer, op. cit., p. 164.

---

[105] John B. Cobb, Jr., The Structure of Christian Existence (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967), pp. 124, 135.

[106] W. Norman Pittinger, "Bernard E. Meland, Process Thought and the Significance of Christ," in Ewert Cousins, Process Theology: Basic Writings (New York: Newman Press, 1971), p. 211. Reprinted from Religion in Life 37 (1968), pp. 540-550.

[107] Ibid., p. 214.

[108] Perhaps a Christology proceeding from Whitehead's metaphysics should reflect on the possibility of speaking of Jesus even more strictly in Whiteheadean categories. For example, could the peculiar power and significance of Jesus, perhaps even the question of his divinity, be approached from the perspective of a unique ability to appropriate previous occasions, to experience the eternal ordering and relevance (cont.)

5. Even though Jesus Christ, both as a living person and as revelatory event, is relative to his time and place, he continues to have significance for human life today. Perhaps it is because human beings still ask the question about the meaning and the giving of one's life.[109] Perhaps he is the image by which man can express the fundamental intuition that ultimate reality, God, is part of the context of every becoming. Jesus has become part of the historical process and, at least in objective immortality, has added to the totality of God a new element that will never be lost: consequently in him all reality is changed, because all reality is in God, and therefore the present also "stands in that part of God's changed reality to which the name 'Jesus Christ' points."[110] And the continued and conscious appropriation of the reality of Jesus by countless human beings has given him an immediacy of presence perhaps not approached by any other historical event. Commenting on the thought of Charles Hartshorne, Ralph E. James writes:

> "Jesus" or "the cross" becomes what it is, not only in itself, but also in terms of its function in concrete relationships. This becoming achieves new reality in each additional relationship, and this addition literally increases that to which abstract designations refer. Hence "Jesus" or "the cross" could not be exhausted because the strict reality to which each refers is continually increased, just as "the many become one and are increased by one."[111]

---

of eternal objects (the primordial nature of God), to accept and to respond to the initial aim in such a way that his human freedom did not weaken the ideal satisfaction, the goal of the total process as given to him?

[109] See, e.g., Loomer, op. cit., p. 164.

[110] Ralph E. James, op. cit., p. 147.

[111] *Ibid.*, p. 145.

Does Vico have anything to say on the subject of Jesus in history and the presence of God in him? He only has two or three references to Jesus in the *Scienza nuova* and they are all in the nature of passing remarks: the attitude reflected is the attribution of unique, eminent, supernatural being and function to both Jesus and Christianity. In this Vico only reflected the theology of his own time. It may be possible to apply some of the fundamental principles of Vico's thought to the subject of Christology, provided it is clearly understood that this is a contemporary reflection and extension of his principles, not something that Vico had envisaged or foreseen in any way. Through this type of reflection it appears that the thought of Vico could logically lead in the direction of a process Christology. The following areas may be mentioned by way of example.

1. Jesus could be described as an eminent instance of the historical action of the provident God who transforms the shortsighted decisions of men into new values and new being, especially in Jesus' death and resurrection. Again, an exemplification of the historical interplay of imagination and reflection, myth and philosophical reason could be seen, in the perennial dialectic between the person of Jesus, the response of faith and theological developments.

2. Jesus' relationship to the Father might perhaps be studied under Vico's fundamental principle that *verum et factum convertuntur*, i.e., Jesus could be understood as the truth of

God's being realized in history.

3. The axiom of historical understanding, i.e., that the nature of things is their being born at a certain time and in certain fashions, may reasonably be applied to Jesus Christ, but not only in the sense of the unity of language and event, as called for by W. Taylor Stevenson. It would seem more fruitful to understand by this principle the relativity of Jesus to his historical situation, his dependence upon history as constitutive of his being.

At this point these very tentative suggestions merely serve the purpose of indicating that in the area of Christology as well the thought of Vico is not, at least at first glance, totally closed to the contemporary efforts to look at Jesus of Nazareth from the perspective of the fullness of his humanity and of a philosophy of becoming.

Summary and Conclusions

The discussion of Vico's theological orthodoxy cannot be resolved on the basis of an absolute philosophical perspective or with a classical concept of God. If the discussion is to be advanced in any significant manner alternative ways of speaking and thinking about God must be investigated. Two of these possible alternatives were discussed in this chapter, both in the broad stream of process thought.[112]

---

[112] Ewert H. Cousins describes three senses in his use of the term process: (i) the tradition that has its source in Whitehead, (ii) the evolutionary wing of process thought as represented, e.g., by Teilhard de Chardin, and (iii) a broader process tradition that could be identified in authors such as William James, Bergson, and Hegel. (See Cousins, ed.,

XUM

One alternative develops from a historical vision of reality, the other from a metaphysical position.

The historical vision offers a clear articulation of Vico's dilemma in contemporary language and from the same perspective of history. Immanence and transcendence are spoken of as a presence of God in history, a presence to being that leads beyond being; or they are interpreted from the analogy of personal encounter made possible by self-revelation taking place in the historical situation. But, while the contrast between a God in himself and a God in history is fully recognized, and a unity between the two is earnestly sought, the achievement of this unity remains ambiguous.

Vico first tried a metaphysical approach to knowledge and to God in De antiquissima: Liber metaphysicus, but he was not satisfied with the results and eventually moved in a different direction, and did not try to speak of God metaphysically again. The conclusion of this chapter is that Whitehead's metaphysics and its developments supply the metaphysical step for Vico's thought and make both explicit and internally coherent the concept of ideal order and historical action in God. There are several ideas that could be looked upon as points of contact between Vico and process metaphysics, but it

---

Process Theology, pp. 9-12). In this chapter the term has also been applied to authors in the tradition of historical understanding. On the other hand, no mention has been made of Teilhard de Chardin and the authors who use his thought as a starting point. This would be another very fruitful field in which to look for an alternative theological basis compatible with Vico's thought. The decision not to use this material was simply one of selection in view of the limitations of the present work.

is the concept of the dipolar being of God, the vision of his tender, saving care and persuasive action, the identification of God as He Who Calls the whole process of history and each individual occasion towards new realizations that seem a most logical and fitting advancement in Vico's intellectual search.

Christian theology, of course, is rooted in the event of Jesus Christ. It is here that the historical and the metaphysical visions come together, and the same person of Jesus appears as both the historical becoming of God and the concrete expression of God's continued relatedness to the world and to man. There is no Christology at all in Vico's works, but some of his principles could be extended in the direction of a process view of Christ, especially if Vico's axiom of historical understanding is applied to the person of Jesus, so that his nature is also seen as the being born at a certain time and in a certain fashion.

The concept of God and the question of Christology are two examples of the thesis that what is most profound and lasting in the work of Giambattista Vico is very much at home with some forms of contemporary theology and that in this dialogue Vico's vision is given the opportunity to grow and to develop further in a direction consistent with its basic thrust.

Conclusion

Any student interested in the reading and understanding of Vico would ordinarily begin by a careful study of his autobiography. And yet the autobiography does not become fully intelligible until the person becomes fully acquainted with the mature and final form of Vico's thought. The reason is that Vico applies to his own life the principles of historical understanding developed in the Scienza nuova and interprets his own history from this perspective. This procedure becomes apparent in at least three areas. First, Vico writes his life as a study of a human mind and its development, and only the events that have a bearing on his intellectual journey are recorded. Secondly, he remembers his life as a providential course of events where misfortunes turn out to be blessings and nothing can stop the inner dynamism and unfolding of his personal history; for example, his failure to win a coveted academic post becomes the occasion for a new determination of study and reflection leading to the first edition of the Scienza nuova. Thirdly, the history of his thought is presented as the interplay between an abstract, intellectual, philosophical moment and a concrete, empirical, philological moment, and the search for balance and unity between them.

This search for a mode of knowledge both rational and empirical at the same time, without subordination or resolution of one pole into the other, is truly the key for an appreciation of Vico. It appears in his early works where he calls for a process of education and a method of study that would give temporal priority to the _topica_ (i.e., research and discovery) over the _critica_ (i.e., rational analysis and enunciation of principles). The search continues in his attempt at a metaphysical system, where it is found in the principle of the relationship of knowing and making. An intermediate solution is found in the field of the theory of law, where the principles of universal (or natural) law are discovered as coming into being as well as into being known through the concrete of positive law. And, finally, Vico arrives at a satisfactory answer in the study of history, or in the "Principles of a New Science Concerning the Common Nature of Nations," the full title of the _Scienza nuova_. Theoretically the search is expressed in the discovery that the _certum_ of history (i.e., historical data), because it is the _factum_ of man (i.e., man's creation), will reveal the _verum_ of man (i.e., the true being of man).

The greatness and the importance of Vico are to be found in his study of history: he rescued it from neglect and made it into the most fruitful source of knowledge of man's own being. History is not only the work of the historians: this is the culmination of the process, the moment of rational

XUM

reflection. History is also a process, involving a genesis and a becoming, a developing and maturing, a decline and fall. But this three-fold pattern is only one side of the process, its temporal and concrete aspect. There is another side, an ideal, eternal aspect that is working its way in and through the concrete, temporal aspect, towards a goal, an ideal history always ahead of the process and never fully realized, a possibility always in the process of becoming. History is in a real sense man's creation, what man has made, and this realization gives rise to another two-sided process: on the one hand the study of history, especially from its origins, will lead to a new understanding of man's being, and on the other hand the study of the modifications of the human mind will help in the understanding of history itself. For Vico the emphasis in the understanding of man is on his social nature and on the process of awareness, imagination, and reflection. The social nature of man is best understood by a study of man in groups, as "nation," rather than as an abstract individual. And the process of becoming, both in history and in each human being, is the interaction between imagination and reason, poetic expression and philosophic reflection, myth (the imaginative universal) and the generalized abstractions of philosophy, creative novelty and resulting institutions.

The process of history is not exhausted in the study of man. Man is also revealed as a finite being tending towards the realization of an infinite ideal, always limiting and at times threatening that realization by reducing the eternal to the temporal and capturing the ideal in the concrete. But there is another element at work in the process of civilization, preserving it and moving it forward, transforming its self-seeking activity into the opening for a new moment in history. This element is the action of God in history, "divine providence," in Vico's terms. Vico's God exists as utterly transcendent, but acts as thoroughly immanent in his relations to man and man's history. These conflicting aspects in Vico's idea of God are not reconciled in Vico, but the conflict cannot be resolved by reducing his thought to absolute idealism and historicism or to pantheism or to scholastic orthodoxy.

Vico's search leads to the twentieth century and the time when historical consciousness becomes one of the controlling elements of man's vision of himself and of his world. In this climate of opinion Vico's ideas appear almost as utterances of commonplace and obvious truths, but they become remarkable statements when they are seen in the historical setting of the beginning of the eighteenth century and against the dominance exercised by Descartes' thought as the background from which Vico's own thought emerged. The current modes of thought that accept the implications of historical understanding for theological thinking show a profound affinity for Vico's thought and appear as a logical extension and application of his insights into history. In particular, the impasse of the transcendence versus the immanence of God, the subject of long and bitter debates in the history of the interpretation of Vico, can be broken and the limits of his thought can be surpassed by some of the contemporary concepts of God that described his reality as somehow historical, internally related to the world in process, in one aspect primordial and absolute but in another consequent and relative.

And, if history reveals man and his world as a process of becoming, it is to be expected that the future will hold still further developments that will continue to be realized through the creative and reflective powers of man and the saving action of God's providence in man's history.

A Chronology of Vico's Major Works

1693--*Affetti di un disperato*, poem.

1703--*Principum neapolitanorum coniurationis anni MDCCI historia*. Historical work never published during Vico's lifetime, because it did not please the political figure who had commissioned it.

1709--*De nostri temporis studiorum ratione*. Inaugural address for the academic year 1708-1709. There were six other inaugural addresses given between 1699 and 1707, but they were not published until 1823 (the second) and 1869 (the remaining five).

1710--*De antiquissima italorum sapientia ex linguae latinae originibus eruenda: Liber primus seu metaphysicus*.

1716--*De rebus gestis Antonii Caraphaei*. The second major historical work.

1720--*De uno universi iuris principio et fine uno*.

1721--*De constantia iurisprudentis*.

1722--*Notae in duos libros, alterum 'De uno universi iuris principio' etc., alterum 'De constantia iurisprudentis' etc.* This item and the two preceding ones were designated by Vico himself with the single title *Diritto universale*.

1725--*Scienza nuova prima in forma negativa*. Never published because Cardinal Lorenzo Corsini (later Pope Clement XII), to whom it was dedicated, refused to assume the expenses of publication. This work is now lost.

1725--*Principj di una scienza nuova d'intorno alla natura della nazioni, per lo quale si ritruovano i principj di un altro sistema del diritto naturale delle genti*. A rewritten, shortened version of the previous item, published by Vico at his own expense, generally known as *Scienza nuova prima*.

1729--*Vita di Giambattista Vico scritta da se medesimo*. First written in 1725, published in Venice in 1729, with an addition and corrections, as the first of a proposed series of autobiographies by famous Italian writers. At Vico's death an *Aggiunta* was found updating the material to the beginning of 1731. This work is often referred to as the *Autobiografia*.

1730--*Cinque libri di Giambattista Vico de' principj d'una Scienza nuova d'intorno alla comune natura della nazioni*. This edition is known as the *Scienza nuova seconda*.

1744--*Principj di Scienza nuova d'intorno alla comune natura delle nazioni*. This edition was not published until after Vico's death and is now known either as *Scienza nuova seconda (1744 edition)* or as *Scienza nuova terza*.

The rest of Vico's writings includes correspondence, minor historical pages, addresses, commemorative pieces for marriages and deaths, poetry, and others.

Selected Bibliography

I. Primary Sources

Bergin, Thomas G., and Fisch, Max H. The New Science of Giambattista Vico. Revised trans. of the third edition (1744). Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968.

Fisch, Max H., and Bergin, Thomas G., eds. The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico. Introduction by Max H. Fisch. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, Great Seal Books, 1963.

Gianturco, Elio, ed. and trans. On the Study Methods of Our Time. With introduction, notes, and selected bibliography. Indianapolis, Ind.: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1965.

Vico, Giovanni Battista. La Scienza nuova. Giusta l'edizione del 1744 con le variazioni dell'edizione del 1730 e di due redazioni intermedie inedite e corredata di note storiche a cura di Fausto Nicolini. 3 vols. Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1911-1916.

______. La Scienza nuova e opere scelte. A cura di Nicola Abbagnano. Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1952.

______. Opere. A cura di Benedetto Croce, Giovanni Gentile, e Fausto Nicolini. 8 vols. Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1911-1941.

I. Le orazioni inaugurali, il De italorum sapientia, e le polemiche. A cura di Giovanni Gentile e Fausto Nicolini. 1914.

II. Il diritto universale. A cura di Fausto Nicolini. 1936.
Parte prima. Sinopsi e De uno.
Parte seconda. De constantia iurisprudentis.
Parte terza. Notae, Dissertationes, Nota bibliografica e indici.

III. La Scienza nuova prima, con la polemica contro gli "Atti degli Eruditi" di Lipsia. A cura di Fausto Nicolini. 1931.

IV. La Scienza nuova giusta l'edizione del 1744 con le varianti dell'edizione del 1730 e di due redazioni intermedie inedite. 2 vols. A cura di Fausto Nicolini. 1928.

V. *L'autobiografia, il carteggio e le poesie varie*. A cura di Benedetto Croce. 1911.

VI. *Scritti Storici*. A cura di Fausto Nicolini. 1939.

VII. *Scritti vari e pagine sparse*. A cura di Fausto Nicolini. 1940.

VIII. *Versi d'occasione e scritti di scuola*. A cura di Fausto Nicolini. 1941.

______. *Opere.* A cura di Fausto Nicolini. 1 vol. Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1953.

______. *Oeuvres choisies*. Par J. Chaix-Ruy. Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 1946.

______. *Principj di scienza nuova d'intorno alla comune natura delle nazioni*. Terza impressione corretta, schiarita, e notabilmente accresciuta. 2 vols. in one. Naples: Stamperia Muziana, 1744.

II. *Secondary Sources*

Abbagnano, Nicola. *Storia della filosofia*. vol. 2, part 1. *Filosofia moderna sino alla fine del secolo XVIII*. Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1948.

______. "Vico e l'illuminismo: risposta a F. Nicolini." *Rivista di Filosofia*, XLIV, 3 (July, 1953), pp. 338-342.

Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Atti del convegno internazionale sul tema: *Campanella e Vico: Problemi attuali di scienza e di cultura*. Roma 12-15 Maggio 1968. Rome: 1969.

Adams, H. P. *The Life and Writings of Giambattista Vico*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1935.

Alderisio, Felice. "La concezione vichiana della 'lex naturae' o diritto universale, ed un esame della interpretazione datale dal Croce." *Rassegna di scienze filosofiche*, XIV, 1 (Jan.-Mar., 1961), pp. 2-34.

Amerio, Franco. "Critici cattolici e non cattolici di G. B. Vico." *Giornale di metafisica*, VII, 6 (Nov.-Dec., 1952), pp. 711-736.

______. *Introduzione allo studio di G. B. Vico*. Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1947.

______. "I quattro autori del Vico: saggio sulla genesi della Scienza nuova." Giornale di metafisica, V, 5 (Sept.-Oct., 1950), pp. 739-741.

______. "Sull'interpretazione di Vico." Giornale di metafisica, VI, 1 (Jan.-Feb., 1951), pp. 71-78.

______. Vico. 2a edizione. Brescia: "La Scuola editrice," 1946.

Autori vari. Campanella e Vico. Padova: C.E.D.A.M., 1969.

Autori vari. Giambattista Vico nel terzo centenario della nascita. Naples: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1971.

Autori vari. Omaggio a Vico. Naples: Morano Editore, 1968.

Badaloni, Nicola. "Il problema della grazia e della provvidenza nella filosofia di G. B. Vico." Società, II, 7-8 (July-Dec., 1946), pp. 667-677.

______. Introduzione a G. B. Vico. Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 1961.

______. "L'idealismo e il cattolicismo in G. B. Vico." Società, V, 2 (June, 1949), pp. 278-283.

______. "Storia e metafisica nel pensiero di G. B. Vico." Società, VII, 2 (June, 1951), pp. 217-240.

Baltazar, Eulalio R. "Teilhard de Chardin: A Philosophy of Procession." New Theology No. 2, Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman, eds., pp. 134-150. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965.

______. God Within Process. Paramus, N.J.: Newman Press, 1970.

Bellofiore, Luigi. La dottrina della provvidenza in Vico. Padova: C.E.D.A.M., 1962.

______. Morale e storia in G. B. Vico. Padova: C.E.D.A.M., 1972.

Berlin, Isaiah. "Sulla teoria del Vico circa la conoscenza storica." Lettere italiane, XVII, 4 (Oct.-Dec., 1965), pp. 420-431.

Berry, Thomas M. The Historical Theory of Giambattista Vico. Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1949.

Bloch, Marc. *The Historian's Craft*. Trans. by Peter Putnam. Introduction by Joseph R. Strayer. New York: Random House, 1953.

Braaten, Carl E. "Toward a Theology of Hope." *New Theology No. 5*, Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman, eds., pp. 90-111. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968.

Bradley, William. "The Theological Quest for the Historical Jesus." *The Journal of Religion*, XLIII, 1 (Jan., 1965), pp. 35-48.

Bultmann, Rudolf. *History and Eschatology: The Presence of Eternity--The Gifford Lectures, 1955*. Harper Torchbooks. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1957.

______. "New Testament and Mythology." *Kerygma and Myth*, I, Hans Werner Bartsch, ed., pp. 1-44. Trans. by R. H. Fuller. London: S.P.C.K., 1957.

Buonaiuti, Ernesto. "G. B. Vico interpretato da un idealista." *Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica*, III, 6 (Dec. 20, 1911), pp. 670-680.

Butterfield, Herbert. *Man on His Past: The Study of the History of Historical Scholarship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954.

Candela, Silvestro. *L'unità e la religiosità del pensiero di Giambattista Vico*. Naples: Edizioni "Cenacolo Serafico," 1969.

Caponigri, A. Robert. *Time and Idea: The Theory of History in Giambattista Vico*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953.

Cappello, Carlo. "G. B. Vico e il processo contro gli ateisti." *Salesianum*, VIII, 3-4 (July-Dec., 1946), pp. 326-342.

Chaix-Ruy, Jules. "La religion de J. B. Vico." *Les études philosophiques*, VI, 1 (1951), pp. 46-57.

Child, Arthur H. "Making and Knowing in Hobbes, Vico, and Dewey." *University of California Publications in Philosophy*, XVI, 13 (1953), pp. 271-310.

Chiocchetti, Emilio. "Giambattista Vico nella mente di Benedetto Croce." *Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica*, III, 3-4 (June 20, 1911), pp. 381-394.

XUM

______. *La filosofia di G. B. Vico: Saggi*. Milan: Società editrice "Vita e Pensiero," 1935.

Ciardo, Manlio. *Le quattro epoche dello storicismo: Vico-Kant-Hegel-Croce*. Bari: Gius. Laterza e Figli, 1947.

Cobb, John B., Jr. *A Christian Natural Theology: Based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1965.

______. "Christianity and Myth." *The Journal of Bible and Religion*, XXXIII (1965), pp. 314-320.

______. *God and the World*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, Paperback, 1969.

______. "Ontology, History, and Christian Faith." *Religion in Life*, XXXIV (1964-65), pp. 270-287.

______. "Speaking about God." *Religion in Life*, XXXVI (1967), pp. 28-39.

______. *The Structure of Christian Existence*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967.

______. *Varieties of Protestantism*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960.

______. "Whitehead's Philosophy and a Christian Doctrine of Man." *The Journal of Bible and Religion*, XXXII (1964), pp. 209-220.

Collingwood, R. G. *Essays in the Philosophy of History*. Edited with an introduction by William Debbins. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965.

______. *The Idea of History*. London: Oxford University Press Paperback, 1969.

Colombu, Mario. *Giambattista Vico*. Trani: Vecchi & Co.-Editori, 1957.

Copleston, Frederick. *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. II: *Mediaeval Philosophy: Augustine to Scotus*; Vol. VI: *Wolff to Kant*. Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1952 and 1961.

Corsano, Antonio. *Giambattista Vico*. Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1956.

______. *Il pensiero religioso italiano dall'umanesimo al giurisdizionalismo*. Bari: Gius. Laterza e Figli, 1937.

______. "Interpretazioni cattoliche di Vico." *Rivista di filosofia*, XL, 3 (July-Sept., 1949), pp. 288-314.

______. *Umanesimo e religione in Giambattista Vico*. Bari: Gius. Laterza e Figli, 1935.

______. "Vent'anni di studi italiani sul Vico." *Cultura e scuola*, IX, 35 (July-Sept., 1970), pp. 84-108.

Cousins, Ewert H., ed. *Process Theology: Basic Writings*. New York: Newman Press, 1971.

Cox, Harvey. "Ernst Bloch and 'The Pull of the Future.'" *New Theology No. 5*, Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman, eds., pp. 191-203. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968.

Croce, Benedetto. *Bibliografia vichiana*. Accresciuta e rielaborata da Fausto Nicolini. 2 vols. Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1947-1948.

______. *Conversazioni critiche: Serie Quarta*. 2a edizione. Bari: Gius. Laterza e Figli, 1951.

______. "Differenza dello storicismo hegeliano dallo storicismo nuovo." *Discorsi di varia filosofia, I*. Bari: Gius. Laterza e Figli, 1945, pp. 116-128.

______. *La filosofia di G. B. Vico*. Sesta edizione, terza edizione economica. Bari: Editori Laterza, 1973.

______. *La storia come pensiero e come azione*. Settima edizione. Bari: Gius. Laterza e Figli, 1965.

______. "Perchè non possiamo non dirci 'cristiani.'" *La critica*, LX (1942), pp. 289-297.

______. *Teoria e storia della storiografia*. Sesta edizione riveduta. Bari: Gius. Laterza e Figli, 1948.

______. *The Philosophy of Giambattista Vico*. Trans. by R. G. Collingwood. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913.

De Sanctis, Francesco. *Opere*. A cura di Carlo Muscetta. Vol. IX: *Storia della letteratura italiana*, vol. 2. Turin: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1958.

Dewart, Leslie. *Religion, Language, and Truth*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1970.

______. The Foundations of Belief. New York: Herder and Herder, 1969.

______. The Future of Belief: Theism in a World Come of Age. New York: Herder and Herder, 1966.

Dilthey, Wilhelm. Pattern and Meaning in History: Thoughts on History and Society. H. P. Rickman, ed. Harper Torchbooks. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1961.

Dobbin, Edmund J. "Reflections on W. Pannenberg's Revelation Theology." Louvain Studies, IV, 1 (Spring, 1972), pp. 13-37.

Donati, Benvenuto. Nuovi studi sulla filosofia civile di G. B. Vico: con documenti. Florence: Felice LeMonnier, 1936.

Donzelli, Maria. Natura e humanitas nel giovane Vico. Naples: Istituto italiano per gli studi storici, 1970.

Falco, Enrico de. La biografia di G. B. Vico: Introduzione, figurazione, commentario. Rome: Casa Editrice M. Ciranna, 1968.

Fassò, Guido. I quattro autori del Vico: Saggio sulla genesi della "Scienza Nuova." Milan: Dott. A. Giuffrè-Editore, 1949.

______. Vico e Grozio. Naples: Guida, Editori, 1971.

Federici, Giulio Cesare. Il principio animatore della filosofia vichiana. Rome: Apud aedes Universitatis Gregorianae, 1947.

Finetti, Gian Francesco. Difesa dell'autorità della sacra scrittura contro Giambattista Vico. Dissertazione del 1768 con introduzione di Benedetto Croce. Bari: Gius. Laterza e Figli, 1936.

Fisch, Max H. "Croce e Vico." Rivista di studi crociani, V, 1 and 2 (Jan.-Mar., Apr.-June, 1968), pp. 5-29; 151-171.

Flint, Robert. Vico. Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1884.

Fubini, Mario. Stile e umanità in Giambattista Vico. 2a edizione con un'appendice di nuovi saggi. Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1965.

XUM

Garin, Eugenio. La filosofia, Vol. 2: Dal Rinascimento al Risorgimento. Milan: Casa editrice Dottor Francesco Vallardi, 1947.

Garin, Eugenio. La filosofia come pensare storico. Bari: Editore Laterza, 1959.

Gardiner, Patrick, ed. Theories of History: Readings from Classical and Contemporary Sources. Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1959.

Gemelli, Agostino, ed. G. B. Vico: Volume commemorativo nel secondo centenario della pubblicazione della "Scienza Nuova" (1725-1925). Milan: Società editrice "Vita e Pensiero," 1926.

Gentile, Giovanni. Studi vichiani. Messina: Giuseppe Principato-Editore, 1915.

Giannantonio, Pompeo. "La dottrina vichiana del mito e alcuni esempi di miti paralleli." Rivista di studi crociani, V, 2 (Apr.-June, 1968), pp. 172-189.

Gianturco, Elio. "The Scholastic Substructure of Vico's Thought." The New Scholasticism, XII, 3 (July, 1938), pp. 284-291.

Gilkey, Langdon. Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God Language. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969.

Giusso, Lorenzo. La filosofia di G. B. Vico e l'età barocca. Rome: S. a. editrice Perella, 1943.

Grimaldi, Alfonsina Albini. The Universal Humanity of Giambattista Vico. New York: S. F. Vanni, 1958.

Guglielmi, M. A. "La metafisica di Vico nelle sue fonti leibniziane." Archivio della cultura italiana, III, 1 (Jan.-Mar., 1941), pp. 23-34.

Hamilton, Kenneth. "Homo Religiosus and Historical Faith." New Theology No. 3, Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman, eds., pp. 53-68. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966.

Hartshorne, Charles. A Natural Theology for Our Time. LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1967.

______. Anselm's Discovery: A Re-examination of the Ontological Proof for God's Existence. LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1965.

XUM

______, and Reeves, William L. Philosophers Speak of God. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953.

______. Reality As Social Process: Studies in Metaphysics and Religion. Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1953.

______. The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God. 2nd edition. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964.

______. The Logic of Perfection and Other Essays in Neoclassical Metaphysics. LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1962.

Harvey, Van A. The Historian and the Believer: The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief. Macmillan Paperback. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1969.

Jacobelli Isoldi, Angela Maria. G. B. Vico: La vita e le opere. Bologna: Cappelli, 1960.

______. "Il pensiero di Vico nell'interpretazione di Croce." Giornale critico della filosofia italiana, XXIX, 1 and 2 (Jan.-Mar., Apr.-June, 1950), pp. 30-55; 162-182.

______. "Vico e Marx." Giornale critico della filosofia italiana, XXX, 1 and 2 (Jan.-Mar., Apr.-June, 1951), pp. 69-102; 228-253.

James, Ralph E., Jr. The Concrete God: A New Beginning for Theology. The Thought of Charles Hartshorne. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1967.

Kaufman, Gordon D. "On the Meaning of 'Act of God.'" Harvard Theological Review, LXI (1968), pp. 175-201.

______. "On the Meaning of God: Transcendence Without Mythology." New Theology No. 4, Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman, eds., pp. 69-98. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967.

______. Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960.

______. Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968.

XUM

Kaufman, Gordon D. "Two Models of Transcendence: An Inquiry into the Problem of Theological Meaning." The Heritage of Christian Thought: Essays in Honor of Robert Lowry Calhoun. Robert E. Cushman and Egil Grislis, eds., pp. 182-196. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1965.

Labanca, Baldassare. Giambattista Vico e i suoi critici cattolici. Naples: Luigi Pierro, 1898.

Lamanna, E. Paolo. Storia della filosofia. Vol. III: Da Cartesio a Kant. Florence: Felice LeMonnier, 1961.

Lawler, Justus George. "The Future of Belief Debate." New Theology No. 5, Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman, eds., pp. 178-190. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968.

Levi, G. A. "Posizione di Vico rispetto alla religione." Humanitas, V, 16 (June, 1950), pp. 589-592.

Lifshitz, M. "G. B. Vico." Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, VIII, 3 (Mar., 1948), pp. 391-414.

Lindbeck, George A. "The Framework of Catholic-Protestant Disagreement." The Word in History: The St. Xavier Symposium, T. Patrick Burke, ed., pp. 102-119. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966.

Löwith, Karl. Meaning in History. Phoenix Books. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967.

______. Nature, History and Existentialism, and Other Essays in the Philosophy of History. Edited with a critical introduction by Arnold Levison. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1966.

______. Permanence and Change: Lectures on the Philosophy of History. Cape Town, South Africa: Haum, 1969.

McBrien, Richard P. Do We Need the Church? New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969.

Magnino, Bianca. Illuminismo e Cristianesimo. 3 vols. Brescia: Morcelliana, 1960.

Mandelbaum, Maurice. The Problem of Historical Knowledge: An Answer to Relativism. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1938.

Manno, Ambrogio Giacomo. *Lo storicismo di G. B. Vico.* Naples: Istituto editoriale del Mezzogiorno, 1965.

Manson, Richard. *The Theory of Knowledge of Giambattista Vico.* Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1969.

Marrou, Henri-Irénée. *The Meaning of History.* Trans. by Robert J. Olsen. Baltimore: Helicon Press, Inc., 1966.

______. *Time and Timeliness.* Trans. by Violet Nevile. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969.

Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederick. *The German Ideology.* R. Pascal, ed. New World Paperbacks. New York: International Publishers, 1949.

Mazlish, Bruce. *The Riddle of History: The Great Speculators from Vico to Freud.* New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966.

Meinecke, Friedrich. *Historism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook.* Trans. by J. E. Anderson, with a foreword by Sir Isaiah Berlin. London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1972.

Metz, Johannes B. "Creative Hope." *New Theology No. 5,* Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman, eds., pp. 130-141. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968.

Meyerhoff, Hans, ed. *The Philosophy of History in Our Time: An Anthology Selected and with an Introduction and Commentary.* Image Books. Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959.

Mooney, Christopher S. *Teilhard de Chardin and the Mystery of Christ.* New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966.

Nicolini, Fausto. *Autobiografia di Giambattista Vico (1725-1728): con XIV medaglioni illustrativi e 30 tavole fuoritesto di cui 5 doppie.* Milan: Valentino Bompiani editore, 1947.

______. "Il Vico e il suo censore ecclesiastico." *La critica,* XXXIX (1941), pp. 302-309.

______. *La giovinezza di Giambattista Vico (1668-1700): saggio biografico.* 2a edizione riveduta. Bari: Gius. Laterza e Figli, 1932.

______. *Commento Storico alla seconda Scienza nuova.* 2 vols. Rome: Edizioni di "Storia e letteratura," 1949-1950.

———. *La religiosità di Giambattista Vico: Quattro saggi*. Bari: Gius. Laterza e Figli, 1949.

Niebuhr, Richard H. *The Meaning of Revelation*. Macmillan Paperbacks. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960.

Nota, John H. *Phenomenology and History*. Trans. by Louis Grooten and the author. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1967.

Ogden, Schubert. "What Sense Does It Make to Say: 'God Acts in History?'" *Journal of Religion*, XLII, 1 (Jan., 1963), pp. 1-19.

Omodeo, Adolfo. "Il valore umano della storia cristiana." *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana*, IV (1923), pp. 332-352.

Paci, Enzo. *Ingens Sylva: Saggio sulla filosofia di G. B. Vico*. Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, Editore, 1949.

Pannenberg, Wolfhart. "Appearance as the Arrival of the Future." *New Theology No. 5*, Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman, eds., pp. 112-129. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968.

———. *Basic Questions in Theology: Collected Essays*. Trans. by George H. Kehm. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970-1971.

———. *Jesus, God and Man*. Trans. by Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968.

———. "Redemptive Event and History." *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, Claus Westermann, ed., pp. 314-335. English trans. edited by James Luther Mays. Richmond: The John Knox Press, 1963.

———, ed. *Revelation as History*. Trans. by David Granskou. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1969.

———. *Theology and the Kingdom of God*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969.

———. *What is Man? Contemporary Anthropology in Theological Perspective*. Trans. by Duane A. Priebe. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970.

Rahner, Karl. *Hearers of the Word*. Revised by J. B. Metz. Trans. by Michael Richards. Montreal: Palm Publishers, 1969.

______. *The Christian Commitment: Essays in Pastoral Theology*. Trans. by Cecily Hastings. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963.

______. *Theological Investigations*. Vol. V: *Later Writings*. Trans. by Karl H. Kruger. Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966.

Rad, Gerhard von. *Old Testament Theology*. 2 vols. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962, 1965.

Reese, William L., and Freeman, Eugene, eds. *Process and Divinity: The Hartshorne Festschrift*. LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1964.

Richardson, Alan. *History Sacred and Profane*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964.

Ricoeur, Paul. *History and Truth.* Trans. with an introduction by Charles A. Kelbley. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965.

Robinson, James M., and Cobb, John B., Jr., eds. *Theology as History*. *New Frontiers in Theology*, vol. 3. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1967.

Rossi, Paolo. *Le sterminate antichità: studi vichiani*. Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1969.

Scerbo, Giuseppe. "Il metodo cartesiano e la riduzione della filologia a scienza in Vico." *Logos*, XVII, 1-2 (Jan.-June, 1934), pp. 19-25.

Sciacca, Michele Federico. "Vico e il criterio della verità." *Il Veltro*, XI, 3 (June, 1967), pp. 291-296.

Schoonenberg, Piet. *The Christ: A Study of the God-Man Relationship in the Whole of Creation and in Jesus Christ*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1971.

Scrocca, Alberto. *Giambattista Vico nella critica di Benedetto Croce*. Naples: Editore Dr. Gennaro Giannini, 1919.

Sherburne, Donald W. *A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966.

XUM

Smith, Elwyn A. "The Historicity of God." The Journal of Religion, XLIII, 1 (Jan., 1963), pp. 20-34.

Soleri, G. "Rivendicazione di Vico." Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica, XLII, 1 (Jan.-Feb., 1950), pp. 69-82.

Spaventa, Bertrando. La filosofia italiana nelle sue relazioni con la filosofia europea. 3a edizione. Bari: Gius. Laterza e Figli, 1926.

Stern, Fritz, ed. Varieties of History. Meridian Books. Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1956.

Stevenson, W. Taylor. History as Myth: The Import for Contemporary Theology. New York: The Seabury Press, 1969.

Tagliacozzo, Giorgio, ed., and White, Hayden V., co-ed. Giambattista Vico: An International Symposium. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969.

Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre. The Divine Milieu: An Essay on the Interior Life. Harper Torchbooks. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1965.

______. The Future of Man. Trans. by Norman Denny. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1964.

______. The Phenomenon of Man. With an Introduction by Sir Julian Huxley. Trans. by Bernard Wall. New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1959.

Tommaseo, Niccolò. G. B. Vico. Introduzione di Antonio Bruers. Torino: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1930.

Toulmin, Stephen E., and Goodfield, June. The Discovery of Time. London: Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers) Ltd., 1965.

Vaughan, C. E. "Giambattista Vico: An Eighteenth-Century Pioneer." Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, VI, 3 (July, 1921), pp. 266-288.

Vaughan, Frederick. The Political Philosophy of Giambattista Vico: An Introduction to La Scienza Nuova. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972.

Villa, Giovanni. La filosofia del mito secondo G. B. Vico. Milan: Fratelli Bocca Editori, 1949.

Whitehead, Alfred North. Adventures of Ideas. Mentor Book. New York: The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., n.d.

______. Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology. Harper Torchbooks. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1960.

______. Religion in the Making. Meridian Books. Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1960.

______. Science and the Modern World: Lowell Lectures, 1925. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946.

______. Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect. Capricorn Books. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959.

______. The Function of Reason. Boston: Beacon Press, 1959.

Wildiers, Norbert Max. An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin. Trans. by Hubert Hoskins. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1968.

Williams, Daniel Day. The Spirit and the Forms of Love. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1968.

XUM